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Case study: Ver-o-Peso Market in Belém do Pará, Brazil



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Front page image: View of waterfront walkway and tents at Ver-o-Peso Market complex, Belém do Pará, Brazil (by Igor - stock.adobe.com)

Project overview:

USAID's Ansanm Ann Chanje Lavil (Together Let's Change the City) initiative, or simply LAVIL, supports increased municipal service delivery in select municipalities to achieve long-term, sustained local economic development in Haiti. In its initial phase, LAVIL focuses on public markets – multi-functional spaces that play a vital role in the local economy and promote social cohesion, but are challenging for local governments to manage effectively. LAVIL promotes the sustainable management of public markets, stimulating local solutions for basic services with an emphasis on solid waste, co-creating spaces for multi-stakeholder dialogue, and increasing capacities within municipal governments. LAVIL is implemented by Cities Alliance in partnership with the municipalities of CapHaïtien and Les Cayes, Fondazione Associazione Volontari per il Servizio Internazionale (People for Development), Habitat for Humanity, Institute for Housing and Urban Development Studies, and the Institut de Formation et de Services (Institute of Training and Services). This document, "Case study: Ver-o-Peso Market in Belém do Pará, Brazil" is part of the LAVIL initiative. Its aim is to contribute toward promoting cross-learning based on practices from other cities from the Global South.

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

COP 30	United Nations Climate Conference
COPSAN	Coordination of Food and Nutrition Security Policies
COSANPA	<i>Companhia de Saneamento do Pará</i> (concessionaire)
DEVISA/SESMAS	Belém Health Surveillance Department
DPH	Department of Historic Heritage, Belém
DPHAC	Department of Historical, Artistic and Cultural Heritage, Pará
HDI	Human Development Index
IBGE	Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics
IPHAN	National Institute of Historic and Artistic Heritage (<i>Instituto do Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico Nacional</i>)
Lacore	Conservation, Restoration and Rehabilitation Laboratory
SECON	Secretariat of Economy, Belém
SeMOB	Executive Superintendence of Urban Mobility of Belém
SESAN	Municipal Sanitation Department
SEURB	Municipal Secretariat of Urbanism
TLPL	Location and Operation License Fee
UFPA	Federal University of Pará





Executive Summary

Ver-o-Peso Market or *Mercado Ver-o-Peso*, the subject of this case study, is one of the best-known public markets in Brazil and is considered the largest open-air fair in Latin America.¹ The waterfront market is located in the port city of Belém, which has a population of 1,303,403 and is the capital of the northern state of Pará in the Amazon region.²

Ver-o-Peso Market actually consists of a group of markets and fairs, referred to as a “complex” in this study. The complex includes two enclosed markets, one for meat and the other for fish; three fairs, *Açaí*, *Pedra do Ver-o-Peso* (docks), and Vegetable and Fruits; various sectors such as herbs and medicinal plants, crafts, meals, bars, nuts, etc.; and historical monuments such as the *Solar da Beira* building and *Praça do Relógio*.

The history of Ver-o-Peso is intertwined with that of Belém. The city was founded in 1616 and the market soon thereafter. Its name, *Ver-o-Peso*, comes from a term meaning “the place of weighing” (deriving from its original purpose as a place where goods were weighed for taxes and sales). Over almost four centuries, the complex has been renewed, changing little by little and growing alongside the city of Belém, while retaining its traditions and cultural aspects. The Ver-o-Peso complex was listed by the National Institute of Historic and Artistic Heritage (*Instituto do Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico Nacional*) or IPHAN in 1977 because of its tangible and intangible cultural heritage value.

Currently, Ver-o-Peso has around 5,000 workers distributed among the 1,193 permissionarios (licensees) who have stalls, boxes, and platforms. There are also several informal vendors.³ Around 25,000 people visit the complex daily, generating a monthly turnover of R\$ 2 million (around US\$ 400,000), which makes Ver-o-Peso one of the main contributors to the economy of Belém and the state of Pará.⁴

The market’s customers are mainly people from Belém and other urban centers in the metropolitan region, as well tourists looking to discover local crafts, cuisine, and culture.⁵

Many factors may have contributed to the resilience of the Ver-o-Peso complex throughout Belém’s urban development process. Among these are the significance of the complex’s culture and tradition; the collaborative efforts of traders from different sectors forming associations to advocate for their rights with the municipal government of Belém, referred to as “Belém City Hall” or simply “city hall”; and above all, the fact that city hall has created a mechanism for representatives of these associations to participate in the management of the complex.

The Ver-o-Peso complex was selected for this case study because of its historical and economic importance for the city of Belém and the broader Amazon region; its symbolism, social dynamism, cultural diversity, and goods and services sold; and its great influence in the construction of cultural and economic identity for thousands of individuals in Belém.

This case study discusses the history of Ver-o-Peso as a public market space managed by city hall with the active participation of market traders’ associations in its management process. These associations participate in the day-to-day management of the market on a consultative basis. This includes ongoing dialogue with city hall through frequent meetings, where they present demands for improving services and maintenance. According to federal and municipal laws, the participation of these associations is compulsory during the planning, preparation, and approval of restoration or renewal projects proposed by city hall or by IPHAN, the federal organization responsible for preserving the complex’s historical heritage. For some projects, the members of these associations may elect members to form a commission to monitor the implementation of the projects together with city hall.

The case study also describes how the market has grown and changed along with the city and how the administrative processes have evolved, and it offers a long-term vision for the market. The following are some of the main lessons highlighted in this case study.

- The Ver-o-Peso complex is a well-managed, multi-functional public market located in the city center that maintains local, cultural, and social-economic functions and also attracts tourists.
- This is a market that engages not only the traders but also other actors in its administration, maintenance, and supply chains. This approach helps to make the market resilient and better able to face the challenges from the city's development and the pressures from local politics.
- Both the listing of the historic market as part of national and municipal heritage and the existence of a national or local regulatory system guaranteeing the participation of market traders' associations and other local social organizations in the market management process contribute to the preservation of local traditions, culture, and customs and facilitate the adaption of the market to the urbanization and modernization processes of the city.

It is hoped that this case study of the Ver-o-Peso Market complex can offer a learning experience for mayors and other stakeholders about the participatory processes involved in the administration of a historic market, its operation, and the conservation, improvement and/or beautification interventions that have been implemented over time.

1. Introduction to the Case Study



Markets symbolize living histories and remain crucial social hubs, acting as vital drivers in the community, in addition to fulfilling their primary commercial function. Faced with the accelerated process of urbanization and technological, social, and consumer changes, markets have the challenge of adapting to modernity to survive.⁶

Ver-o-Peso Market, in the city of Belém, is one of the best-known public markets in Brazil and is considered the largest open-air fair in Latin America.⁷ Over almost four centuries, the market complex has been renewing itself, changing little by little and growing alongside Belém, while retaining its traditions and cultural aspects.

This document briefly explores the history of Ver-o-Peso, its cultural and economic context, and its operation and management by the city of Belém, along with the active participation of market traders' associations. The case study also describes the process of dialogue and meetings between these associations and city hall, through which the associations can present demands for improving services and maintenance.

As will be discussed in the case, the associations also actively participate in the planning and preparation of intervention projects proposed for the complex by city hall or by the National Institute of Historic and Artistic Heritage (*Instituto do Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico Nacional*) or IPHAN, the federal organization responsible for preserving the market complex's historical heritage.

The case study approach was chosen in order to better accommodate the many rich examples and lessons than can be drawn from the operation and management of the unique and historic Ver-o-Peso public market. We used a desk study strategy for searching and collecting the information for the preparation of this case study. The information came from articles published in local



Markets symbolize living histories and remain crucial social hubs, acting as vital drivers in the community, in addition to fulfilling their primary commercial function."

newspapers, websites from the municipality of Belém, thesis dissertations produced by master's students of local universities, reports from the ministry of culture, and several articles published in scientific journals.

The Ver-o-Peso Market case study is divided into the following sections: (1) Introduction; (2) Setting: Belém and Ver-o-Peso Market; (3) Spatial and commercial organization: Sectors, actors, interventions; (4) Administrative structure, regulatory frameworks, and participatory processes; (5) Infrastructure, environmental quality, and health surveillance; (6) Socioeconomic characteristics and financial context; and (7) Conclusions and lessons. Throughout the text, boxes and illustrations are included to highlight diverse aspects or stories considered important to better understand the cultural and economic significance of Ver-o-Peso Market for the people and the city of Belém.



2. Setting: Belém and the Ver-o-Peso Market Complex



The Ver-o-Peso Market complex is located in the city of Belém, capital of the state of Pará, in the Amazon region of northern Brazil (Figure 1). Belém is situated on Guajará Bay, which is formed by a confluence of several rivers that feed into the vast Amazon River delta in northern Pará. The area has an equatorial climate with high temperatures, a large volume of rainfall, and high humidity.

According to the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), the city has a population of 1,303,403 and a demographic density of 1,230.25 inhabitants per square kilometer.⁸

2.1 Belém: History and socioeconomic context

Belém was founded in 1616 by Portuguese colonizers, who, due to the local geostrategic importance, built military installations in Belém territory.⁹ In the 18th century, Belém was the most important regional center of trade for products extracted from the Amazon rainforest destined for local and international markets, and it was the main point of arrival for European products to supply the regional market.¹⁰ It was this intense movement of product trade that gave rise to the Ver-o-Peso market, a commercial hub created to help and facilitate the city's commercial circulation needs.¹¹

Belém's great economic boom occurred in the period of 1890–1920, when the city became the most important regional trade center of latex and other products extracted from the Amazon forest. The decline in latex exports later in the 20th century resulted in the city's economic decline, as will be discussed below. Even so, Belém has continued to be a dynamic center in the north of Brazil, as well as the most important city in the state of Pará.¹²



Ver-o-Peso has evolved far beyond its origins as a port and free market Its greatest wealth today lies in the fact that it **represents** a place of the **memory** of the city of **Belém**."



Figure 1. General location map of Ver-o-Peso Market in the city of Belém, in the state of Pará, Brazil, with Belém indicated in solid red within the circle, Pará in pale yellow, and northern Brazil in tan. (Adapted from Alice Hunter, CC BY-SA 4.0 <<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>>, via Wikimedia Commons; labels added.)



Belém waterfront with historic buildings in background (Monique Renne / Melhores Destinos)

Currently, Belém's economy is anchored in the tertiary sector, encompassing areas such as public administration, services, and commerce. The city is the largest commercial hub in the state of Pará, with some large

industries focused on the transformation of raw materials. The main local industries are food products and fishing, naval, metallurgical, and chemical.¹³

The municipality of Belém continues to play a leading role in the marketing of products from throughout the Amazon interior. There is a significant production of traditional products, such as herbs, condiments, and Amazonian fruits, including the exploitation of açai and Brazilian chestnut harvesting. Tourism has grown in recent years, in particular due to the city's historical richness and local cuisine.¹⁴

The disorderly growth of the city of Belém in recent decades, however, has culminated in high indicators of poverty, violence, and social inequality. According to IBGE, Belém's Human Development Index (HDI) is 0.746, and the GINI index is 0.43.¹⁵ Also, according to IBGE, the average monthly salary was 3.5 minimum wages (around US\$ 998) in 2021 and the proportion of employed people in relation to the total population was 28.61%.¹⁶ In 2010, the school enrollment rate for children 6-14 years old was 96.1%.

2.2 Ver-o-Peso market complex

The Ver-o-Peso market complex is situated on the banks of Guajará Bay in Belém. The market actually consists of a group of markets and fairs, together referred to as "Ver-o-Peso complex" or just Ver-o-Peso in this study.



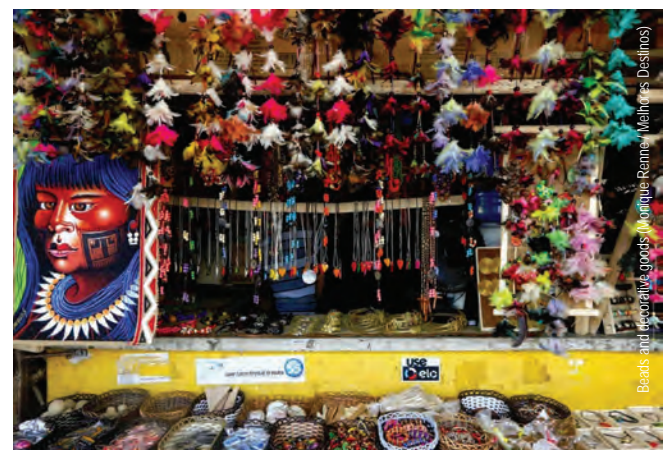


Ver-o-Peso includes two enclosed markets (the Francisco Bolonha meat market and a fish market, also called “Iron Market”); three fairs: Açaí, *docas* (Docks), waterfront walkway (*Pedra do Ver-o-Peso*), and the Vegetable and Fruit Fair; along with numerous other sectors and historical monuments.

The history of Ver-o-Peso dates back to the 17th century, specifically 1625, when the tax and commercial post “*Casa de Haver-o-Peso*” (House of Weighting) was constructed. Initially serving as a tax warehouse for the Portuguese Crown to collect taxes on goods from the colony, it eventually evolved into a large, open market. Its development accompanied the development of Belém, which in the 18th century was the largest trade center of the Brazilian Amazonia region.¹⁷

Today, the Ver-o-Peso complex extends over 25,000 square meters. It is made up of markets, fairs, a small river port (called “*Docas*”), squares, and several historical monuments that are part of the city’s cultural heritage. Ver-o-Peso Market, as well as some of the other historical structures are visible when approaching the city from the water (see photos above). The Ver-o-Peso complex is recognizable by the distinctive white canvas tents that make up a significant part of the fair’s sectors, the historic blue building of the Fish Market with its four towers (a century-old construction made of iron imported from Europe), and next to it, the imposing mansion, *Solar da Beira* (where the complex’s administration works).

Within the market complex, there is a great diversity of products sold by sectors distributed among markets, fairs, and other monuments. It is worth highlighting that the participation of riverside residents plays a fundamental



role in maintaining the complex's stocks.¹⁸ The main consumers of Ver-o-Peso come from the population of Belém, along with people from other urban centers in the Metropolitan Region of Belém and tourists looking to discover local crafts, cuisine, and culture.

Ver-o-Peso is a place of intense social and cultural life, where traditional work practices are still used and complex networks of social relationships are formed between sellers and buyers. Its rich blend of colors, smells, and shapes, together with its people form a great cultural and tourist attraction for the city of Belém.¹⁹ The market's attributes, such as its product diversity, relatively satisfactory quality, and prices, guarantee this place the title of "the Largest Free Market in Latin America". All together, Ver-o-Peso constitutes a postcard of the city of Belém.²⁰

Although the market complex had a daily influx of around 50,000 people before the Covid-19 crisis²¹, today only 25,000 people visit each day. Nevertheless, this activity still generates a monthly turnover of R\$ 2 million (around US\$ 400,000), which makes Ver-o-Peso one of the highest contributors to the economic activity of Pará. Ver-o-Peso has evolved far beyond its origins as a port and free

market where all types of products are sold. Its greatest wealth today lies in the fact that it represents a place of the memory of the city of Belém. It has thus consolidated itself as an important place for cultural practices, where regional daily life and Amazonian imagery are reproduced and perpetuated through the most diverse traditional activities.²²

The Ver-o-Peso complex has been recognized as a place of national historical and artistic heritage due to its unique conformation, which results from the integration of architectural, urban, and landscape elements developed over centuries. Its cultural and historical significance led to its designation under Decree-Law No. 25, issued on November 30, 1937.

Additionally, Ver-o-Peso was listed by IPHAN, highlighting its exceptional value as an architectural and landscape complex, in 1977.²³ Being part of the list of national historical and artistic heritage guarantees that these properties are not distorted or destroyed. These assets cannot be repaired or restored without prior authorization from IPHAN, but they are eligible to receive funding from IPHAN for their maintenance and eventual restoration.



Bottles of Cheiro do Para bath fluids on display at Ver-o-Peso Market (by Braym - stock.adobe.com)

3. Spatial and Commercial Organization: Sectors, Actors, Interventions



The origin of the spatial configuration of Ver-o-Peso may be said to refer to the origin of the spatial configuration of Belém itself, according to Costa and others²⁴, considering that the dynamics of the city are reflected in this space. With the founding of Belém in 1616, an entire spatial logic was created in the city in terms of organization, as social relations took place in space, creating needs that expanded, in structural and functional terms. And in this context, with its privileged location in the expansion area of the very young city's urban nucleus, Ver-o-Peso was established from the beginning as a hub for a large influx of people and products, characterizing itself as an area of intense commercial and cultural, material, and symbolic exchanges.

The commercial organization of Ver-o-Peso is today the result of the long experiences and traditions of the various salespeople who have worked there over time. Currently, there are around 5,000 workers in the Ver-o-Peso complex, distributed among the 1,193 *per-missionarios* (licensees) who operate stalls, butchers, platforms, and other informal activities.²⁵ These activities are organized around products and processes that take place mostly in well-defined spaces, if not by physical landmarks, but by symbolic borders.²⁶

3.1 Sectors and actors

The spaces in the Ver-o-Peso are designated by local workers as sectors or blocks. The sectors relate to each other, not only through sociability practices shared in the territory, but also in the commercial sphere, as they often supply each other—and, in some cases, even supply other fairs and markets in Belém and vice versa.²⁷ The Ver-o-Peso sectors are therefore part of extensive chains that bring together groups that form regional society, in whose ethnic and cultural diversity, the knowledge,

“ The origin of the spatial configuration of **Ver-o-Peso** may be said to refer to the origin of the spatial configuration of **Belém** itself ... considering that **the dynamics of the city are reflected in this space.** ”

practices, and traditions associated with the territory and its natural resources are preserved and transmitted.²⁸

Ver-o-Peso complex has a multitude of formal and informal actors. Each formal sector has its own actors with their respective histories, traditions, and customs. There are also informal sector actors, such as street vendors who sell coffee, CDs, imported items, etc. In Figure 2 you can see the location and photos of the 10 main units of the complex: 1- Fish or Iron Market; 2-*Solar da Beira* (administrative headquarters); 3-*Feira do Ver-o-Peso* (Vegetables and Fruits); 4- Municipal Market (Meat or *Bolonha*); 5-*Pedra do Peixe* (Docks Fair); 6-Clock Square; 7- *Açaí* Fair (Dawn Market); 8-Fisherman's Square; 9-Parking; 10-Castle Fort.

The identification and location of the 22 formal sectors that made up the Ver-o-Peso complex in 2012 are shown in Figure 3.²⁹ The locations of key commercial markets and fairs are in color: Fish Market (blue), Meat

Market (orange), Vegetable & Fruit Fair (yellow), Açaí Fair (purple). Today, the number of formal sectors has grown to 33.³⁰

We have chosen to highlight sectors that we consider most representative of Ver-o-Peso in a series of boxes throughout the case. These are the Meat Market; Fish Market; *Feira da Pedra do Peixe* (Docks Fair); Herbs and Medicinal Plants Sector; Açaí Fair; Meals Sector; and *Hortigrangeiros* (Vegetable & Fruit Fair). Three of these are especially important because they represent

a significant part of the complex's history and regional culture. These are the *Feira da Pedra do Peixe* (Docks Fair); Herbs and Medicinal Plants Sector; and the Meat or Bolonha Market (*Mercado da carne*). In the boxes for these three sectors, we also briefly describe the traditional actors involved and the logistical flow in the market. The boxes for the Meat and Fish markets also include data on their history and operation and a time-line of interventions carried out for their conservation, maintenance, and beautification.



Figure 2. Aerial view of Ver-o-Peso complex. (Source: IPHAN Pará, 2011, with graphic design by Luciano Gemaque and photo by João Ramid.)

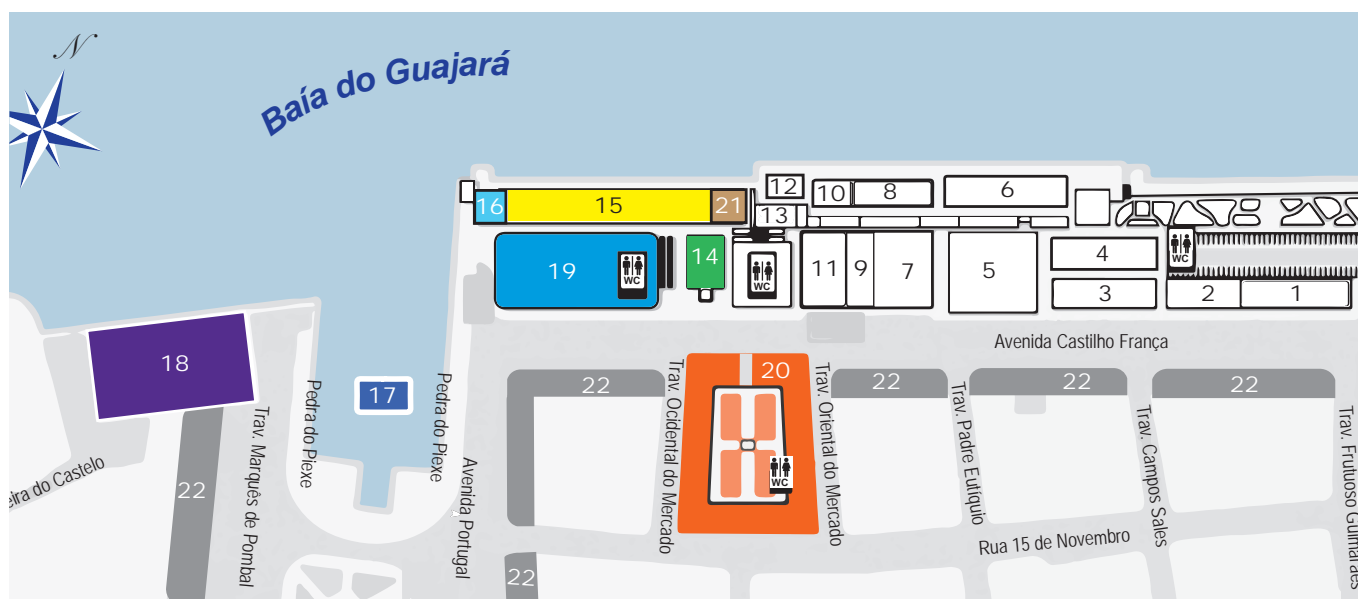


Figure 3. Location of the 22 commercial sectors of the Ver-o-Peso complex in 2012: 1-Industrialized; 2-Hardware; 3-Imported; 4-Ornamental plants; 5-Meals; 6-Bars; 7-Fruits/Nuts from Pará; 8-Maniva; 9-Groceries; 10-Crafts; 11-Flour, Dried Shrimp, and Pirarucu; 12-Fruit Pulp; 13-Live Animals; 14-Medicinal Herbs; 15-Vegetables and Fruits; 16-Salted Fish; 17-Docks; 18-Açaí; 19-Fish; 20-Meat; 21-Seeds; 22-Stores (adapted from IPHAN Pará, 2011 from Maria Dorotéia de Lima, 2007.).



Fishing, açaí, and other boats docked at Ver-o-Peso (by Pedro - stock.adobe.com)

Box 1: Pedra do Peixe (Docks)

Pedra do Peixe, which means “Fish Rock”, is the place where boats, loaded with fish, dock for the fish to be sold. Even today in Ver-o-Peso, the marketing of fish in Pedra do Peixe, or simply “Pedra”, remains centrally important. Its production chain and circulation networks have existed in some form since the city’s colonial period, including when the fish landed there was used as a means of paying public servants and ecclesiastical authorities.³¹

The landing and sale of fresh fish takes place at Pedra during late night and early hours of the morning (see photos in , boxes 1 and 2). The fish is then distributed through a complex network of commercial transactions, until it reaches final consumers in Ver-o-Peso, and in practically all fairs and (super) markets in Belém and the surrounding area.³²

Between 70 and 80 tons of fish arrive at Pedra do Peixe daily. This quantity increases during the Holy Week period, reaching 100 tons per day. Much of this fish comes from riverside regions in the northeast of Pará.³³

After the fish are sold in Pedra, this space is transformed for other uses, such as more intense circulation of people coming and going to the markets, sectors, and fairs of Ver-o-Peso to look for products offered during the specific opening hours of each sector.³⁴

In recent years, there have been some tentative suggestions from state and municipal managers to change the destination of the current use of this space of the fair. The motives put forward were hygiene and better organization of the use of the space. The fierce resistance of the fishermen fair associations has so far blocked this move. Although its organization may appear to be somewhat chaotic from the outside, Pedra in fact satisfies the group of users who interact in this central place. It remains a commercial landmark and a symbolic reference point for Ver-o-Peso, one that has been focused on the reception and distribution of fresh fish throughout the city since its genesis.³⁵



Unloading fish at Pedra, by Anderson Barbosa / Amazônia Latitude 2023 (CC BY 4.0 (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>))

Box 2: Feira da Pedra do Peixe: Actors and logistical flow

ACTORS: *Pescadores* (fishermen), *Marreteiros* (ice breakers), *Virador* (turners), *Balanceiros* (balancers), *Carregadores* (porters), *Compradores* (buyers)

Fish landing, marketing, and distribution activities at Ver-o-Peso take place daily from midnight on at *Pedra do Peixe*, and involve different actors divided into two distinct worlds: the aquatic and the terrestrial environment. The *Pedra* is the stage for these actors, who form the social network around the fish that arrives at Ver-o-Peso.

The aquatic environment involves fishermen and ice breakers, with their vessels, known as “glaciers” (specialized in transporting and preserving fish), and icers (who unload the merchandise).

On land, balancers and buyers negotiate production, while turners and loaders wait for negotiations to begin the process of transporting fresh fish. *Virador* help the balancers, who provide support in assembling scales and storing equipment. *Balanceiros* or balancers weigh the production of each vessel and mediate purchases, and loaders carry the boxes of fish purchased by buyers on their heads.

Buyers are represented by stallholders, fishmongers (including those from Ver-o-Peso’s own Fish Market, since in *Pedra do Peixe*, sales are wholesale), and buyers from restaurants, supermarkets, and fish distributors from other regions of Pará and abroad. Other agents involved in this process are loaders, workers who transport the fish to buyers’ vehicles.

Among the actors mentioned above, one of the most important is the balancer. The balancer coordinates the entire process, guiding those involved regarding the actions to be carried out at the beginning and end of

each transaction, with the information exchanged between fishermen, balancers, and buyers being always of fundamental importance.

After disembarking, the requested volumes are checked in the presence of the buyer and the balancer, with all notes on weights and values recorded in notebooks. At this stage, the turner’s role is to assist the balancer in checking and ensuring the balance works properly. Figure 4 shows the different logistical flows present in *Pedra do Peixe*, highlighting the role of the balancer.

In addition to knowing the fish buyers and coordinating transactions, the *balanceiro* is a kind of financier of the fishery. This role can encompass taking total responsibility for sales, including under “*fiado*”—a kind of informal credit that requires mutual trust—as well as other arrangements.

For example, when a fisherman or boat owner needs money, fishing material, or fuel to go on a trip, he asks the balancer. If it is money, the balancer can use his own resources or may arrange for a loan through another person, who provides the resources to the fisherman. Generally, money advanced to the fisherman or owner of the vessel is called “value” and can be redistributed to the rest of the crew.

For fishing equipment or supplies, ice, or fuel, the balancer authorizes the owner of the supply store or gas station to deliver the requested products to the fisherman. Payment for the products will be made by the balancer later and will be deducted from the purchase price at the end of the sale, when the fisherman involved returns to Ver-o-Peso.

Although such arrangements exist between fishermen and balancers, there is no formal obligation in the decision to sell fish with a single balancer. The fisherman is also not obliged to deliver all his product to the *balanceiro*, given that he can sell directly to factories or fish processing companies located in other regions, which sometimes offer better prices than in Ver-o-Peso.

However, the most observed practice is the ongoing association of fishermen with balancers, with the most important factor being the regularity and longevity of



Crates of fish at Pedra do Peixe, by Anderson Barbosa / Amazônia Latitude 2023 (CC BY 4.0 (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>))

their relationship. And this relationship also includes buyers, who are then part of the fish buying and selling circuit, a circuit that varies according to the harvest.

As shown in Figure 4, the flow of property (*fluxo de propriedade*) is direct from the fisherman to the buyer, since the transaction takes place between these two agents, with the balancer being just an intermediary in the transaction. The payment flow (*fluxo de pagamento*) generally occurs at another time, involving the buyer and balancer and the transfer of these amounts to the fish owners, all at different times. The flow of information (*fluxo de informação*) occurs before transactional decisions, where information is exchanged between fishermen, balancers, and buyers.

The promotion flow (*fluxo de promoção*) is established by the balance sheet as a way of balancing the forces of supply and demand and the purchasing power of different buyers.

These relationships established between balancers, fishermen, and buyers can be classified as relationships of reciprocity and complementarity, in which all agents depend on each other to carry out their functions, and where credit and trust are essential aspects that give continuity to the system of commerce.³⁶



“

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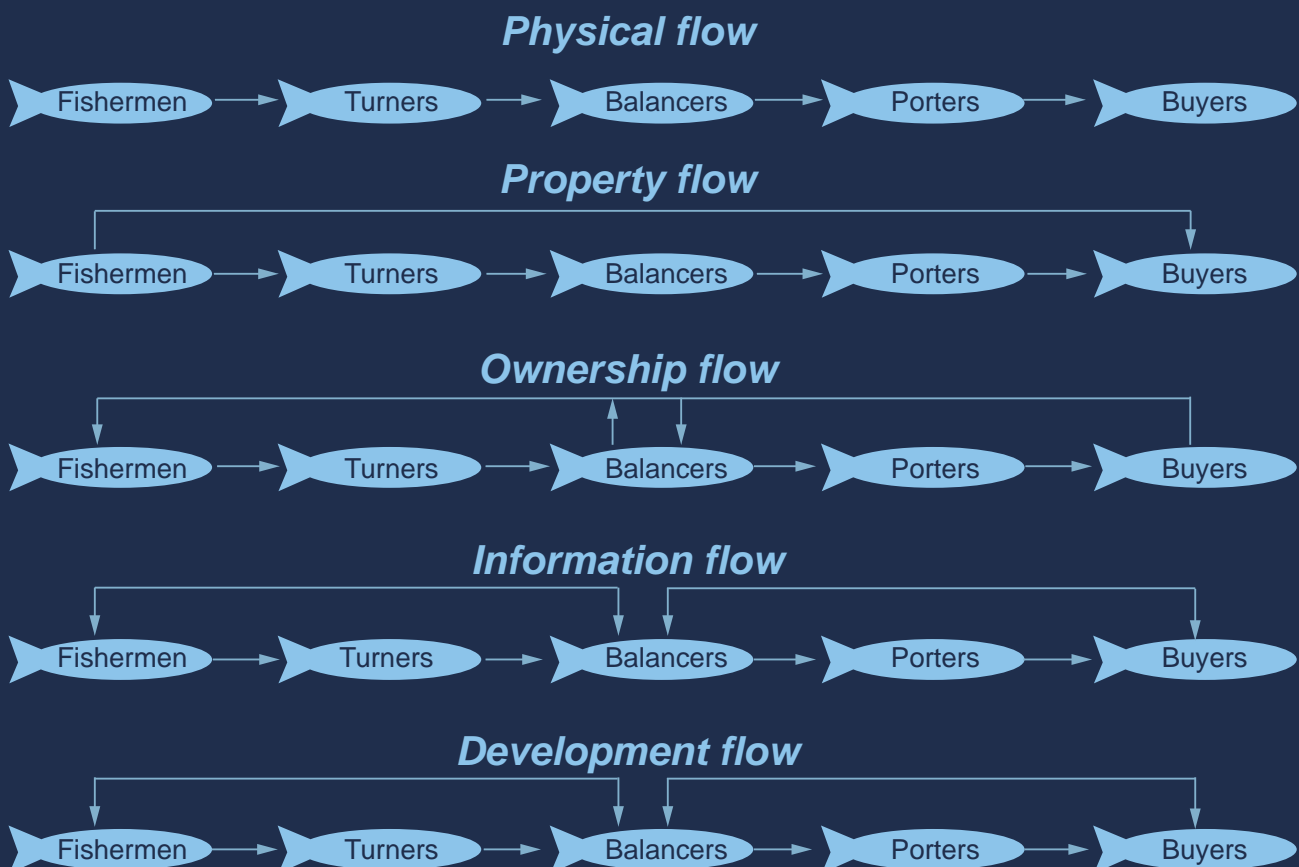


Figure 4. Logistical flows and actors in Pedra do Ver-o-Peso (Source: Leitao et al., 2014)



Box 3: Herbs and Medicinal Plants: Actors and logistical flow

ACTORS: *Erveiros* (herbalists), *Cheirosas* (women herbalists), *Mateiros* (woodsmen), *Arrumadores* (ushers)

One of the most traditional sectors, visited by tourists and promoted by Ver-o-Peso, is the one that sells medicinal herbs, mystical products, and cosmetics. It preserves central elements of the identity of the Amazonian population and of Afro-Brazilian culture: their accumulated knowledge and practices regarding natural resources and an entire system of beliefs in the region.

The Herbal Sector (*setor de ervas*) is located between the Fish Market and Solar da Beira. It has 80 stalls with the participation of 102 herbalists (*erveiros*) and their helpers who sell aromatic herbs and plant essences. Of these stalls, 30 are operated by men and 50 by women. The women are known as “*Cheirosas*” – from the adjective used to describe someone or something that smells nice. Due to the care taken to preserve the secrets of preparing the products, the stallholders themselves are responsible for cleaning and maintaining the area and the stalls, in addition to washing the tarpaulins that cover the sector.³⁷

Herbalists at Ver-o-Peso master the knowledge of herbs and of producing and selling products such as plants,

barks, seeds and medicinal roots to cure body ailments and the soul. These men and women not only sell these products, but also have specialized knowledge to indicate and teach the appropriate way to prepare and consume them. It is these aspects that distinguish them as **holders of traditional knowledge**.³⁸

When selling fresh herbs, herbalists act as resellers of the raw material distributed by *Mateiros* (woodsmen), who regularly come from rural areas to supply the stalls of urban workers who do not have adequate spaces to grow the plants. One of the secrets of the woodsman’s craft is the way of removing and tying up the bush, and the care taken to preserve it.³⁹

In the herbal sector, tidying the stall is a very important point and can be done by the owner himself or by the *arrumador* (usher), responsible for changing labels and packaging, replacing damaged goods, and arranging the products in the stall to make them attractive.⁴⁰

The knowledge of aromatic plants and herbs has been passed from generation to generation, constituting knowledge restricted to families, sometimes acquired

from Indigenous persons, and sometimes acquired from people of African descent. This transmission of customs related to the way of handling herbs, processing them, or even negotiating them with the riverside inhabitants of the interior, is reported orally. This is knowledge that was acquired by ancestors/previous generations who worked at Ver-o-Peso.⁴¹

According to customer needs, herbalists offer so-called “smokers”. These are aromatized herbal compounds, which serve both as attractants and as means of “unloading”, among other functions. As the herbalists explain, the aroma of the smokers exhaled with the smoke helps to ward off bad spirits and negative energies from environments and, thus, attract “good fluids” that are channeled to the people who burn them.

“Fluids” in the form of baths or perfumes are also highly sought after products. Baths are prepared using plants, roots, bark and, sometimes, animals, and have the same purifying or attractive properties as smokers. For example, for children with learning difficulties, *Tia* (aunt) *Coló* may recommend the “Student Bath”. There are others that are prepared and offered for sale with names that suggest their applications: attractive bath;

breaks envy; flame customer; open hand; opens the doors; and others.⁴²

Other products sold are milk, bottles, ointments, smokes, perfumes, and amulets, which attract both local consumers and tourists. Some use them for healing or luck; others take them as souvenirs. There are those who arrive at market stands with shopping lists written by spiritual guides, such as holy fathers or mothers, or with prescriptions from naturalist doctors. Others request guidance from herbalists themselves to solve health, financial, spiritual, sexual problems, among others.⁴³

Herbalists are also producers of what they sell when it comes to herbal preparations. To this end, they use spaces and household objects such as blenders, scales, knives, containers, and measuring spoons. A well-equipped laboratory was created at the headquarters of the *Associação das Erveiras e dos Erveiros* (Association of Herbalists) do Ver-o-Peso with the purpose of processing the products. In addition to improving quality, the initiative aims to help herbalists face growing competition with medicinal plant and natural product stores, as well as meet technical and sanitary requirements relating to the marketing of pharmaceuticals.⁴⁴

3.2 Interventions in Ver-o-Peso and urban development of Belém

Ver-o-Peso market is directly inserted in the origins and consolidation of the city of Belém. Both the city and the market have undergone significant changes over time, for example, during the period from 1870 to 1910. This era became known in Amazonia as “Belle Époque,” a result of the development of the latex economy in the Amazon.⁴⁵ It was at this time that political, social, and economic changes motivated the need for urban modernization to adapt the city to the new world economic order, with investments occurring in numerous spatial and infrastructure transformations throughout the city.

As a result of this growth in commerce, Ver-o-Peso consolidated itself as an important commercial exchange area in the city. During this period, the market area became spatially integrated with the historic neighborhoods of Campina and Cidade Velha, both in geographic and social aspects, assuming the current features of the architectural and landscape complex.⁴⁶

It was also during this period that the mayor of the time, Antonio Lemos, used the resources collected from

rubber taxes to beautify and modernize the city, in accordance with European bourgeois standards. During this period, the Ver-o-Peso area underwent numerous changes, such as the construction of a new port, land-filling and re-urbanization of the market area, and the widening of the road, transforming it into a large “boulevard.” An architectural style popular at the time may be seen in the construction of the Iron Market (Peixes), which was prefabricated in England and brought to the Amazon, and which to this day is part of the landscape of the Ver-o-Peso complex.⁴⁷

A second period of notable change came during the 1940s and 1950s, an interval that describes a time when rubber was no longer exported from the Amazon to Europe, but from the Asian continent. This led to an economic decline in the region and, consequently, in Ver-o-Peso, which no longer collected money, but served only as a meeting point for the sale of goods. This illustrates how the function of the place was modified as a result of a process that directed from the global to the local.

In the 1960s to 1990s, Belém, as in other cities in the country, witnessed rapid and unplanned growth that caused a degradation of the cultural heritage of the



historic center, including Ver-o-Peso. In these years, there was a decrease in the number of residents in the city center, with the consequent increase in empty and underused properties, precarious housing, concentration of informal activities, devaluation of real estate, and change in the socioeconomic profile of residents, users, and local activities.⁴⁸

During this period, Belém also underwent verticalization, changing from a riverside city to an Amazonian metropolis. In this process, structures present in other

large cities—and considered, at the time, to be part of the model to be followed—were implemented in Belém, such as luxury condominiums and shopping centers.⁴⁹ The photos on the next page show two different views of the waterfront illustrate dramatic change in growth. The first image is a contemporary view, but it captures the relatively low profile of Ver-o-Peso from the water, with some of the historic buildings from the late 19th and early 20th century, such as the Fish Market. The second view, from a different angle, shows Ver-o-Peso juxtaposed against the high rise Belém skyline of the modern era.

From 1966 to 1971, then-Mayor Alacid Nunes promoted some changes to improve the organization of the fair at Ver-o-Peso. In this intervention⁵⁰, modifications were made from mobile tents to fixed tents, and the payment of fees was introduced for associations that were created due to the need to maintain order.

In the 1980s, a new intervention was made at the Ver-o-Peso *Feira* (fair) by then-Mayor Almir Gabriel. This intervention promoted an expansion and reorganization of the area, including the standardization of the fair's stalls; restoration of the Iron Market, cannery, and Solar da Beira (building housing central support services); the reconfiguration of the Açaí fair, with the introduction of kiosks; and the clearing of the Ladeira do Castle. The design of this intervention and implementation was carried out without the consultation and participation of workers and associations at the Feira.⁵¹

The main elements that make up Ver-o-Peso today date from the period 1999 to 2007. During this period, the space incorporated areas for the sale of food, handicrafts, meat, fish, herbs, fruits, and vegetables. However, the current context of modernity, resulting in this new configuration, does not exclude the traditions and identity of the place.⁵²

In this same period, then-Mayor Edmilson Rodrigues promoted a new intervention in Ver-o-Peso to restore the complex. The facility had been suffering accelerated degradation due to a significant increase in the number of market traders and informal workers, as well as sanitary problems related to drainage, sewage, and cleaning; a lack of security; and the deterioration of buildings of heritage value. Unlike previous interventions, however, this intervention was carried out in a participatory manner, including through a national competition promoted in conjunction with the Institute of Architects of Brazil (IAB) and the participation of local traders and respective associations.

The winning proposal of the competition for the rehabilitation of Ver-o-Peso market presented a project to reorganize the fair. The proposal included the implementation of new coverings for the stalls to provide greater thermal comfort for the space, and the restoration of buildings of great symbolic value, such as the Fish Market, which considered their functions and specificities. The results of this intervention remain to this day.⁵³ The photos above show the fair with the distinctive white canvas tent roofs installed in this intervention.

The most recent intervention in Ver-o-Peso is scheduled to begin this year. It is part of the city of Belém's preparations to host the United Nations Climate Conference (COP 30) to be held in November 2025.⁵⁴ This renovation, calling for maintenance and adaptation of the

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The market's social function evolved from serving as a place for collecting taxes on exports and imports to becoming the **largest open market in Latin America**. This coincided with the changes undergone by **Belém**, which directly influenced **Ver-o-Peso** ... but **did not change the traditions and identity** of the place.”

entire space, will be financed by Belém City Hall and the Ministry of Cities and will total R\$82 million (around US\$ 18.5 million). It was expected to start in 2024 and will last for 12 months.

The reform will focus on addressing the main complaints of permit holders collected through several meetings with representatives of the various fairground associations. Among the services that will be carried out are the recovery and restoration of the fish and meat markets, the replacement of the complex's tarpaulins (while maintaining the current profile); the renovation of the entire floor, including that of the food sector boxes; the renovation of the entire electrical installation of the complex, including the requalification of the existing energy substation; improvement of accessibility to the market and existing bathrooms; and the revitalization of the Pedra do Peixe and Açaí fair spaces.

From this brief historical overview of the interventions in Ver-o-Peso and the process of urban development in the city of Belém, it is clear that over time, the market's social function had evolved from serving as a place for collecting taxes on exports and imports to becoming the largest open market in Latin America. This coincided with the changes undergone by Belém, which directly influenced Ver-o-Peso and its role in the context of the city's modernization, but did not change the traditions and identity of the place.⁵⁵



Box 4: Fish Market (Mercado de Ferro) and interventions

Fish is one of the most popular products in Ver-o-Peso, passing through the hands of many professionals, from the water to the dining table. Around 80 tons of fish arrive daily, in numerous vessels of all types and sizes, at the dock on the side of the market, known as “*Pedra do Peixe*”. There, weighing and wholesale sales take place, to vendors from Ver-o-Peso itself, from other fairs, markets, and resellers, even from other states. In the stalls of the Fish Market (*Mercado de Peixe*), also known as the “*Iron Market*” (*Mercado de Ferro*), fresh fish shares space with crab, shrimp, salted fish (*pirarucu*), and various other types of seafood.⁵⁶

Construction

The blue Fish Market building stands out for its imposing rectangular structure, with slightly chamfered corners, topped by four magnificent towers visible from land and water. It constitutes a notable example of iron architecture, which spread in Amazonian cities between the 19th and 20th centuries, thanks to the currency generated by the then prosperous rubber trade. This style represents a phase of grandiose transformations in Belém, marked by ideals of beautification, sanitation, and new urban planning.⁵⁷

The market was built on the site where the “*Casa do Haver o Peso*” previously operated. This was a checkpoint and weighing station for taxing goods brought to Belém, which was deactivated in the 1840s and later demolished. With the urbanization of the area, following the landfilling and construction of the port pier that

followed the current avenues, Portugal and XVI de Novembro, to the Piri stream (currently Av. Tamandaré), the Ver-o-Peso dock was built. Near this dock, the construction of the Fish Market began in 1899.⁵⁸

Construction involved assembling the structure, imported from the United States and England, according to a project by Henrique La Rocque and under the responsibility of engineers Bento Miranda and Raimundo Viana. The inauguration took place on December 1, 1901). The market today is an eclectic building, built predominantly in iron). It occupies an area of 1,197 m² and weighs no less than approximately 1,133,389 tons.

Aesthetically, the facades highlight the Art Nouveau influence—a notable style during the Belle Époque—defining the existing decorative motifs, such as the mouldings on the arches of the openings, and the sinuous adornments and friezes on the plat band of the market.⁵⁹

The market was listed by IPHAN in 1977, forming part of the Ver-o-Peso Architectural and Landscape Complex, as a national historical and artistic heritage due to its exceptional value, under the terms of Decree-Law n° 25/1937.⁶⁰

Interventions

The Fish Market has undergone several conservative interventions during its history. Throughout the 20th century, the market went through periods of abandonment, as well as changes such as the addition of

extemporaneous elements (e.g., the facades included rolling metal doors in the doorways and a concrete marquee around the entire perimeter). It also developed serious structural problems, interspersed with works and renovations.⁶¹

In 1985, the first major restoration work on the market took place. This was carried out by Belém City Hall, in which the structure of one of the towers was consolidated, on the corner between the Ver-o-Peso dock and the bay, through a foundation and root footing structure.

The second, a simplified renovation, occurred in 1999 and 2000. This consisted of the adaptation and improvement of the fish sales boxes, with the inclusion of stainless-steel benches for placing ice and displaying the fresh product. In addition, the stores were externally renovated.

Just over 10 years after the last renovation, numerous problems compromised the spatial organization, functioning, and preservation of the building). Given this scenario, IPHAN coordinated and contracted conservation and restoration work on the Iron Market in 2010, with the aim of preserving the architectural characteristics of the market.

Several local organizations participated, together with IPHAN, in preparing the intervention project, as well as in its implementation. Among these, the city of Belém stands out. The Secretariat of Economy (SECON), administrator of Ver-o-Peso, worked with the permission holders (fishmongers and shopkeepers) in mobilizing and organizing them to carry out this work without the interruption of commercial activities; with the Federal University of Pará (UFPA), which, through the Conservation, Restoration and Rehabilitation Laboratory (Lacore), contributed with pictorial surveys and corresponding analyses; and with civil society through messages and questions about the color that would be adopted.⁶²

The intervention consisted of structural stabilization of the building; recovery of structural and iron and masonry sealing elements; implementation of new electrical, telephone, sound, and hydro sanitary installations; the installation of a rainwater drainage system, roof, atmospheric discharge protection system, security cameras, and fire prevention system; and the implementation of a cold room and new bathrooms (including for women and people with physical disabilities).

These improvements were intended to better meet the requirements of supervisory bodies and improve accessibility, operation, and customer service.⁶³ The work relied on IPHAN's own resources, totaling R\$7,126,976.97 (around US\$ 1,532,473), including contractual adjustments.



It was implemented in two phases, from 2010 to 2015. In the first phase, following negotiations with city hall, some of the store licensees were transferred to Solar da Beira, while the fishmongers were concentrated in just one side of the hall. This left the other half available for the renovation work, which began in November 2012.⁶⁴

After the first phase was finished, the other group of permission holders had to release the stores space for renovation, while the fishmongers had to share the newly renovated boxes. In October 2013, the second phase began, covering the other half of the market space. This was finished in the first months of 2015, and the entire building underwent a general review, so that the work could be considered completed.

The market today has a total area of approximately 2,068.52m, in a rectangular layout measuring 31m x 67m, with a covered area of 57m by 21m wide. The space is subdivided between 60 boxes measuring 9.4 m², with fixed partitions integrated with a sink, stainless steel display bench, polypropylene block, isothermal box, and scale (visible in the photos above).⁶⁵

The sale of fish takes place in the main hall, which is divided with boxes of salted fish and various seafoods. The market is surrounded on the outside by stores that sell fishing materials, hardware, religious items, lottery tickets, and variety store items, as well as a police station.⁶⁶





Box 5: Meat Market (Francisco Bolonha) and interventions

The Meat Market, also called “Francisco Bolonha Market”, was built in the Ver-o-Peso area in 1867.⁶⁷ This neoclassical style building was built with just one floor, in stone and plastered brick masonry, to house the municipal market. It underwent a thorough renovation in 1908, undertaken by the engineer Francisco Bolonha. Bolonha erected another floor and introduced imported iron pavilions and railings, iron and bronze gates, a spiral iron staircase with an Art Nouveau style, marble protruding from its granite cobblestone sidewalks—a perfect architectural illustration of the economic heyday based on the export of rubber.⁶⁸ (The location of the Meat Market in the Ver-o-Peso complex can be seen in Figures 2 and 3.)

At the end of the 1908 reform, engineer Francisco Bolonha won a concession to restore the market. Due to this concession, the market was renamed the “Francisco Bolonha Meat Market”. Even today the market maintains the same characteristics of this intervention. The photo

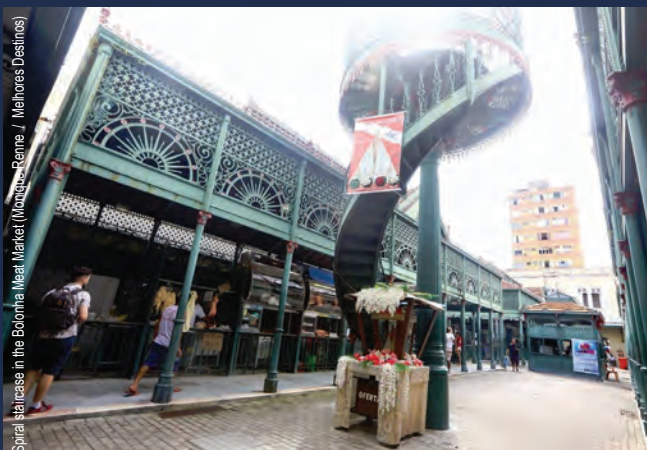
above shows the internal view of the market after a partial renovation in the 1990s that covered the open part of the market with a screen to prevent visits from birds.⁶⁹ Inside the market, there are 64 stalls for selling beef cuts, operating daily in the morning shift. There is a network of agents linked to different stages and types of cutting and treatment of meat, which, at the end of the circuit, is sold by the butcher to the consumer.

During the late 1980s and in the 1990s, the rapid and unplanned growth of cities in Brazil caused the degradation of city centers, with a consequent decrease in the number of residents; an increase in empty and underused properties, as well as in the precariousness of housing; the concentration of informal activities; the devaluation of real estate; and a change in the socio-economic profile of residents, users, and local activities.⁷⁰

In Belém, these changes were also felt in the functioning and conservation of the Ver-o-Peso Meat Market. The various traders in the market began to use the space not only for commerce, but also for housing.

This generally occurred on the second floor and/or in attached structures that divided the space, taking advantage of the high ceilings. Few concessionaires paid the ridiculous fees to city hall, although subletting was common, with subdivisions that altered the original structure of the building.⁷¹ Faced with this declining situation, in 1998, the city council of Belém issued a notice for the rehabilitation of the Ver-o-Peso complex, which included the renovation of the Meat Market.

A commission was created and managed by the Municipal Secretariat of Urbanism (SEURB), which prepared the notice for the reform of the market. According to architect Elizabeth Vieira de Almeida from SEURB,



a committee with representatives from each sector of the market was created to ensure a dialogue with all workers at the fair. The final project was chosen in 2002. However, the renovation only actually began in 2007. This renovation cost more than 5 million reais (around US\$ 1 million), covered by city hall in partnership with the Monumenta Program and the Ministry of Culture.

The intervention included the removal of all additions implemented in disagreement with the original characteristics of the building, as well as the restoration of floors, walls, roof, facades, and metal warehouses; the replacement of electrical, sanitary, and fire installations; and the creation of 64 boxes on the lower floor for selling beef cuts, operating daily in the morning shift.

The renovation resulted in the incorporation of other functions in addition to selling meat, such as food stalls and crafts. It also included the construction of stores with independent access to the streets surrounding the market, the separation of the upper floor stores from the upper external stores to add other activities, and the construction of four main accesses arranged along the facades.

In the internal pavilions, made of cast iron, individual boxes were arranged, as can be seen in Figure 29 distributed in sectors, such as for the sale of meat, meals, crafts, and others.⁷²

In recent times, the sale of meat in the market has been reduced, giving way to other activities, such as the sale of meals, in stalls and internal galleries, grocery items,

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The changes seen in the use of the old Bolonha Market illustrates a dynamic that is typical of the resignifications of **places of memory and heritage.**”

and flour. In the external area there are also supermarkets, hardware stores, grocery stores, and variety stores.

There are also religious houses, traditional points of sale of products for houses of worship of Afro-Amerindian origin. There are also all the stores on the upper floor, which were separated from the lower external stores, to add different activities.⁷³

The changes seen in the use of the old Bolonha Market illustrate a dynamic that is typical of the resignifications of places of memory and heritage.⁷⁴

Box 6: Bolonha Meat Market: Actors and logistical flow

ACTORS: *Lombador* (dealer), *Marchante* (machete), *Açougueiro* (butcher), *Cortador* (cutter), *Vendedor* (seller), *Cliente* (consumer)

The beginning of the meat circuit in the Bolonha Market takes place with a dealer (*lombador*) who receives, loads, and arranges the meat in the boxes. Next is the machete (*marchante*) who has an excellent knowledge of bovine anatomy and who uses knives, axes, and other similar instruments—or, sometimes, just his hands—to cut and separate the best pieces, aiming for maximum use in terms of quantity and quality of the product.

At the end of the circuit is the butcher (*açougueiro*). He is both a meat cutter (*cortador*) and a meat seller

(*vendedor*). The pieces are displayed in the boxes with hooks made of thin rebar, iron, or stainless steel. Depending on the customer's (*consumidor*) taste, he must manipulate machines to tenderize and grind, or use different types of knives to debone and cut the meat. This was traditionally done on the *cepo*—a handcrafted object made from a round piece of wood (usually *piquiá*), with feet like that of a table; however, due to hygiene measures, its use was abolished after the 2007 reform.⁷⁵

4. Administrative Structure, Regulatory Frameworks and Participatory Processes



The institutional arrangement and governance of Ver-o-Peso currently include Belém City Hall as manager, the various associations of market traders in the complex, Ver-o-Peso Institute/*Instituto Ver-O-Peso*, IPHAN, other city hall secretariats, and state companies that provide infrastructure services to the complex.

4.1 Administrative structure

The following is a brief description of some of these different organizations and of their respective roles in the institutional arrangement and governance of the Ver-o-Peso Market complex.

Belém City Hall: The city government structure consists of three divisions: the executive branch, formed by the mayor and his team; the judiciary, which comprises local justice units; and the legislative branch, composed of municipal councilors.⁷⁶

City hall is responsible for the administration of the Ver-o-Peso complex, represented by its Secretariats of Economy (SECON), Environment, Health, and Urbanism. SECON is responsible for maintaining worker registration and coordinating the management process of the Ver-o-Peso complex. The city hall is the decision maker of the management process of the complex.

Market traders' associations of the Ver-o-Peso complex: Each sector of Ver-o-Peso has its respective association. In some sectors of Ver-o-Peso, these associations are called "stallholder associations", and in others, "fair-ground associations". In this case study, all these associations are called "market traders' associations". These associations participate in the management process on a consultative basis by sending proposals to improve services and maintenance of the complex's sectors to SECON, which coordinates the complex's management process. According to federal and municipal laws, the

participation of these associations is compulsory during the planning, preparation, and approval of intervention projects proposed for the complex.

In many projects, representatives of these associations participate in oversight committees for the implementation of these projects.

Instituto Ver-O-Peso/Ver-o-Peso Institute (Union of Traders at the Ver-o-Peso complex): This institute is a class entity organization registered with the government of Pará and represents some of the market traders' associations of the Ver-o-Peso complex with city hall and the state. It participates in a consultative manner in the management of the complex and works as a direct communication channel with city hall and Pará. It presents requests for improvements to the complex and demands compliance with proposals or goals that have been promised, but have not been executed or achieved. It also sometimes supports these associations through training courses and the organization of various technical and social activities.

IPHAN (National Institute of National Historic and Artistic Heritage/Instituto do Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico Nacional): responsible for preserving the historic area of Ver-o-Peso, listed by this institute in 1977. IPHAN is a federal body of the Brazil Ministry of Culture that has the function of analyzing, approving, or rejecting intervention projects in the complex proposed by city hall. So, it must be consulted on matters relating to any intervention proposed for the material heritage of the complex.

Several other organizations also participate in the management of Ver-o-Peso complex on a consultative basis, such as Belém Municipal Guard; Health Surveillance (health department); Municipal Department of Historic Heritage (DPH municipality of Belém); Department

of Historical, Artistic and Cultural Heritage (DPHAC *Estado do Pará*); Papa João XXIII Foundation; Executive Superintendency of Urban Mobility; Worker Portal; Pará State Secretariat for Women; Coordination of Food and Nutrition Security Policies (COPSAN); and representatives of state companies that provide water, sewage, garbage, electricity, transport, health, and security services.

Ver-o-Peso management support services: located within the complex. All support services for the management of the Ver-o-Peso complex are concentrated in Solar da Beira, a renovated neoclassical style mansion that is part of the complex's historical heritage.

On the mezzanine are the office of the Municipal Secretariat of Economy (SECON), responsible for the administration and supervision of the complex, the Municipal Guard station, and the urban cleaning team that works at the site. At the back of the building, there are public bathrooms, which are open 24 hours a day, managed by a cooperative of servants.

On the ground floor, opening onto Boulevard Castilhos França, a display of photographs and handicrafts from indigenous groups was installed a few years ago, which gives it the air of a cultural space.⁷⁷

4.2 Regulatory frameworks

For this case study we divided the legal structure of Belém related to Ver-o-Peso into two parts: the regulatory framework for fairs and for the participatory process.

The regulatory framework for fairs in Belém, which includes the Ver-o-Peso complex, is made up of a municipal decree and one law:

Municipal Decree No. 26579, April 14, 1994, which provides for the operation of open-air markets in the Municipality of Belém and provides other measures.⁷⁸

Art. 20. Chapter V of this municipal decree provides for the Use and Vendor Permission. All stallholders need to register with SECON to obtain a work permit. All permit holders (registered) need to comply with the different regulations of the fair described in the different chapters of this decree, such as marketing, equipment, obligations, penalties, and rights of the permit holder.

Lei (Law) No. 7981/99, of December 7, 1999.⁷⁹ This municipal law regulates the eventual co-management of the street markets and public markets with the municipality. The functioning of this co-management system is explained in art. 20 below.

Art. 20 of this law states that through an agreement, Belém City Hall **may allow** the administration of public markets and official open-air fairs to be shared with the association of permit holders and market traders. The agreement signed between city hall and the association

of permit holders and stallholders must contain the action provisions of the parties involved.⁸⁰

Regulatory frameworks for the participatory process in Belém include three laws: one federal, two municipal, and one state law.

Lei (Law) No. 10.257 of July 10, 2001, also known as the Cities Statute. This federal law obliges all cities with more than 20,000 inhabitants to develop and approve their respective City Statute and Master Plan, including the general guidelines for urban policy. This law contains several articles and several guidelines.⁸¹ For this case study, we only mention article 2, paragraph I, and article 4 of law 10.257:

Article 2nd paragraph I: guarantees the participation of the population and associations representing the various segments of the community in the formulation, execution, and monitoring of urban development plans, program and projects.

Article 4: regulates urban policy instruments such as the Master Plan, environmental zoning, participatory budget management, among others.⁸²

Lei (law) No. 8.655, of July 30, 2008. This municipal law provides for the Master Plan for the city of Belém.⁸³ Among its fundamental principles, we mention Art. 3rd, paragraphs II and IV, and Art. 142:

Art. 3rd Paragraph II, item d: preservation of the Municipality's historical, cultural and environmental heritage and establishing and consolidating the integrated management of cultural heritage;

Paragraph IV: establish democratic management, guaranteeing the population's participation in all decisions of public interest through the democratic management instruments provided for in Federal Law No. 10,257. Of July 10, 2001 (City Statute).

Art. 142 Provides for planning, control, and management in the Municipality of Belém, including various development instruments such as: hearing, debates and public consultations; popular initiative of bills; popular referendum and plebiscite; shared budget management; and free technical and legal assistance.⁸⁴

Lei (Law) No 7.709 of May 18, 1994. This municipal law provides for the preservation and protection of historical, artistic, environmental and cultural heritage of the municipality of Belém and other provisions.⁸⁵

Lei (Law) Estadual 8.784 of November 20, 2018: declares and recognizes as being of public utility for the state of Para, the Union of Traders of Ver-o-Peso Complex (Instituto Ver-o-Peso).⁸⁶

In summary, the Municipal Decree No. 26579, April 14, 1994, and the Laws No. 7981/99, of December 7, 1999



View of the Docks with Pedra do Peixe walkway (© Henrique Ribeiro e Melhores Destinos)

and No. 8.655, of July 30, 2008, are the most important regulatory instruments regulating the operation, participatory process, and management of Ver-o-Peso.

4.3 Participatory processes and the Ver-o-Peso complex

Brazil has a long history of popular participation in public management. Examples are the creation of participatory budgets and city congresses adopted and developed by several cities, including Belém. As previously described, Belém City Hall is the general manager of the Ver-o-Peso complex. Through its secretariats, city hall coordinates the entire process of participation in the management of the complex.

Among the different participatory actors, the most important are the representatives of the 33 market traders' associations of the Ver-o-Peso sectors, plus the Ver-O-Peso Institute. The participatory process in the Ver-o-Peso complex occurs on two levels: matters related to the daily administration and maintenance of infrastructure and services in the complex and matters related to interventions.

For matters related to daily administration and maintenance, the process is consultative. It involves meeting with city hall and the Ver-o-Peso institute that represents the majority of associations of the market traders' associations. In important decisions, these meeting with city hall are open to all associations of the market sectors, but also to the Ver-o-Peso Institute and other local political and social actors.

These meetings can also be called any time by city hall, by the Ver-o-Peso Institute, and by any individual market

trader association to discuss specific problems of day-to-day management, such as public lighting, garbage, sewage, and public safety. When there is a proposal for an intervention in the complex, the planning, development and approval processes must involve the discussion and approval of workers and the association representing the various associations in the market.

These include the Ver-o-Peso Institute, as determined by federal law No. 20.257/2001, City Statute, and the Master Plan of the Municipality of Belém, which provides for mandatory public hearings and consultation before the approval of such projects. The projects also need to be submitted for analysis and approval by IPHAN (the federal body responsible for preserving the heritage of Ver-o-Peso complex); by DPH, the municipal preservation body, as the complex is located in an area listed under Municipal Law No. 7.709/1994; and by DPHAC, a state preservation organization, as the complex is located in an area surrounding an asset listed at the state level, in this case the Port of Belém.

Although the market traders' associations and the Ver-o-Peso Institute have only a consultative role in the management of the day-to-day operations, their participation is important because they represent a permanent communication channel with city hall. They are responsible for sending complaints and proposals for improving services and maintenance of the infrastructure of the complex's sectors to city hall.

Figure 5 illustrates the Ver-o-Peso management system with a Venn diagram. The box below gives an example of the participatory process in practice in its management.



Figure 5. Management system of Ver-o-Peso.

Box 7: Participatory process in the management of Ver-o-Peso: A practical example

The last intervention implemented in the Ver-o-Peso complex dates back to the early 2010s.⁸⁷ Since then, many problems have accumulated related to the supply of electricity, drinking water, sanitation, broken tiles, infiltration of rainwater into the tent canvases, and worsening of the quality of services offered in the complex. These have generated many complaints to Belém City Hall from stallholders and consumers.

As part of the preparations of the city of Belém to host the United Nations Climate Conference (COP 30), to be held in November 2025, an intervention in Ver-o-Peso calling for the maintenance and adaptation of the entire space was approved in 2023. It will be implemented by city hall with funding from the federal government.

Belém City Hall, which manages the complex, held several meetings during 2023 with representatives of the various associations of the complex's stallholders and the Ver-o-Peso Institute to collect complaints and suggestions for improving the complex's basic infrastructure. These included changing the floor and the canvas of the tents, and the improvement of services provided in the complex.

Based on the collected information, Belém City Hall, together with some engineering and architecture firms and technicians from IPHAN (guardian of the complex's cultural heritage) developed an initial intervention project. The project was to be subsequently presented, discussed, and finalized, incorporating suggestions

from the different market traders' associations, and the Ver-o-Peso Institute.

In December 2023, Belém City Hall, with the presence of a team of engineers, architects, technicians and other professionals from the municipal departments involved in preparing the intervention project, promoted five meetings with workers from different sectors of Ver-o-Peso. The meetings were to present the initial project, discuss and resolve doubts about the presented proposals, and receive suggestions for possible changes and/or adaptations.

At the end of these meetings, a report was prepared by Belém City Hall incorporating the demands and suggestions of representatives of associations from the sectors of Ver-o-Peso. As part of popular participation, a Works Inspection Commission (Cofis) for each sector was elected. This commission is made up of 66 members, consisting of 2 from each of the 33 sectors of the complex. This commission will be responsible for monitoring the execution of the final approved project and making sure that the demands of permit holders will be met.⁸⁸

The intervention was scheduled to begin in March 2024 and is expected to last 15 months. The work will be carried out by several local companies selected through public competition and implemented in five stages. Belém City Hall, in agreement with the Ver-o-Peso traders' associations, also selected three locations for the temporary relocation of traders who work in the spaces where the services will be provided.

5. Infrastructure, Environmental Quality and Health Surveillance



Infrastructure services in the city of Belém and in Ver-o-Peso complex are described briefly below, followed by an overview of water quality in Guajará Bay and of air quality and health monitoring in Ver-o-Peso.

5.1 Infrastructure

The city of Belém's infrastructure has been modernized in recent years, but there is a great lack of service in certain public services, such as basic sanitation and housing. Although 71.50% of the population is supplied with potable water, only 15.77% of the population has access to centralized sewage collection, and only 3.53% of this sewage receives some type of treatment.

In relation to urban households, 67.9% have adequate sewerage, 22.3% of households on public roads have trees, and 36.1% have manholes, sidewalks, paving, and curbs.⁸⁹ Just 4% of the urban population does not have garbage collection.⁹⁰

The basic infrastructure of Ver-o-Peso, such as water, sewage, garbage, electricity, and transport, is the responsibility of Belém City Hall and the different state companies that operate these services. They are also responsible for maintaining these infrastructures.

Drinking water: The complex's drinking water supply is provided directly by the water distribution network of the COSANPA concessionaire (*Companhia de Saneamento do Pará*). There is a permanent waste of water, due to the lack of control of the measurement and records of consumed drinking water.⁹¹

Sewage: COSANPA is also responsible for the Ver-o-Peso sewage system. The Ver-o-Peso sewage system is quite deficient. As previously mentioned, only 15.77% of the population of Belém has access to centralized sewage collection. According to the *Instituto de Água*

e *Saneamento*, the region surrounding Ver-o-Peso does not have a sewage collection network.⁹²

Throughout the complex, effluents from the tents flow directly into the grease traps, from there into the inspection boxes, and from there into the local drainage network.⁹³

In relation to sanitation, as noted, there are public bathrooms open 24 hours a day, managed by a cooperative of servants. These toilets are located at Solar da Beira (central support services building).

Drainage: The Ver-o-Peso surface drainage system is deficient and poorly sized. During periods of high water, waters from the bay often return through rainwater galleries, causing flooding in the fair and in the urban surroundings, which worsens in rainy periods.⁹⁴

Electricity: Ver-o-Peso's electricity is provided by the state company, *Equatorial Energia Pará*. The complex's current electrical system is in a precarious condition, due to problems caused by inadequate expansions of electrical installations, which compromise the main electrical system with high overloads and losses. There are often improvised connections and lighting, circuit breakers installed outside the panel, and public lighting control switches with exposed wiring and poorly made connections.⁹⁵

Transport: The Belém transport system oversees the Executive Superintendence of Urban Mobility of Belém (SeMOB). The region around the Ver-o-Peso market is well accessible via the city's public transport system. There is also an area for parking private vehicles near the complex. As the entire operation of the city's transport system consists predominantly of serving neighborhoods via lines heading to the center, several bus lines pass in the vicinity of Ver-o-Peso, which is in the city center. Overcrowding and attendance problems are the most frequent complaints from users.⁹⁶

Domestic waste: Garbage collection in the city is carried out by the Municipal Sanitation Department (SESAN), using compactor trucks following an established street collection schedule. The trucks are equipped with a hydraulic system that compacts the waste, reducing volume and optimizing storage space in the vehicle. In Ver-o-Peso, as throughout the city, Belém City Hall installed containers to store garbage until collection.

The stallholders must take their waste to these containers, which are placed in designated locations in the complex. The purpose of installing containers is to facilitate collection and control discarded waste, so that it is not exposed and spread on public roads.⁹⁷ The waste containers guarantee better sanitary conditions, as they are closed and leak-proof. This helps prevent the entry of animals, as well as rainwater, which could form leachate. Garbage is collected three times a day in Ver-o-Peso, and 24 new containers are spread out to serve those who work and transit through the complex. The photo below shows a collection truck and the containers installed in the market.

Washing is done once a month and lasts a week in order to cover all these spaces. According to Agência Belém⁹⁸, cleaning activities in the Ver-o-Peso complex begin at 6AM and only end after midnight.

There are several sweeping teams that take turns to ensure the cleaning of all areas of the complex, including the Iron Market, *Praça do Pescador*, *Pedra do Peixe*, and fair areas.⁹⁹ There is also a permanent city public cleaning station in the complex, located in the Solar da Praia mansion.

5.2 Environmental quality

The control, monitoring, and management of the environmental quality of the waters and air in the Ver-o-Peso area are the responsibility of the Environment Secretariat of city hall and the Environment Department of Pará.

According to a microbiological study carried out on Guajará Bay and the Guamá River where Ver-o-Peso is situated, these waters present high levels of faecal contamination, especially during rainy periods. The research found that the pollution levels are due to the low level of treatment of domestic and industrial effluents that exists in Belém.¹⁰⁰

Regarding air quality, a study on the perception of air quality in the Ver-O-Peso complex showed that those interviewed in the complex classified the air quality as fair to poor. The interview respondents pointed out the intense vehicle traffic and the presence of garbage and open sewage as the main sources of pollution, causing discomfort and bad smells, especially during the day.¹⁰¹



Bus near Ver-o-Peso (Mônica Regina Delhorres Destinos)



Garbage collection at Ver-o-Peso (Agência Belém)



Birds (fragata) on the beach near the docks (Mônica Regina Delhorres Destinos)

5.3 Health surveillance

Health surveillance in Ver-o-Peso is the responsibility of the Health Surveillance Department-DEVISA/SESMAS of Belém City Hall. It is responsible for preventing and/or eliminating health risks and intervening in health problems arising from the environment, the production and circulation of goods, and the provision of services of health interest.¹⁰² The fish market and the food sector are the sectors that present the most potential health problems. SESMA frequently carries out inspections and controls in these sectors.

6. Socioeconomic Characteristics and Financial Context



Customers buy fresh fish at Ver-o-Peso Fish market (Monique Ferreira Marques Destroes)

6.1 Socioeconomic characteristics

The socioeconomic characteristics of Ver-o-Peso complex presented in this document were collected through a survey conducted with 1,135 license holders of the Mercado Francisco Bolonha (Meat Market), Mercado de Ferro (Fish Market), Açaí Fair, and Vegetable and Fruit Fair.¹⁰³ The Ver-o-Peso complex has relevant economic importance for market traders and consumers, who have this place as their main financial means and as a place to purchase food at more affordable prices.

The research showed that the majority of the workers in the complex (62.8%) know the associations in their respective sectors, but a considerable number of workers

(37.2%) remain unaware. The research also showed that having knowledge about these associations will not necessarily make workers join them. There are a series of problems that tend to limit this social participation of the working class, such as the monthly payment of a fee to the respective associations.

More information on the socioeconomic characteristics of Ver-o-Peso workers, from the 2017 survey by Sousa and others is presented in the box below.¹⁰⁴

6.2 Financial context

As previously mentioned in the institutional arrangement and governance section, Ver-o-Peso is a public market, administered by Belém City Hall, through SECON, its Economy Secretariat. All financial costs of operation and maintenance of Ver-o-Peso are borne by city hall. Some, such as electricity, water, and sewage, are shared with the state companies that provide these services.

The costs of interventions carried out in Ver-o-Peso are covered by Belém City Hall alone, or in partnership with one or more federal government ministries.

All Ver-o-Peso traders need to register with SECON and pay the municipality a Location and Operation License Fee (TLPL). This fee is collected by the municipality and is paid at the time of initial licensing, annual renewal and whenever there is a change in the taxpayer's field of activity or any other changes. Every year the municipality states the new value of the TLPL.

The market traders' associations of Ver-o-Peso collect a certain monthly fee from their members. In exchange, members receive several benefits, such as legal support, promotion of lectures, and courses focused on the daily practices of the complex.



The Ver-o-Peso complex has relevant **economic importance for market traders and consumers**, who have this place as their main financial means and as a place to purchase food at more affordable prices.”

Box 8: Socioeconomic characteristics of Ver-o-Peso permit holders in the Meat Market, Fish Market, Açaí Fair, and Vegetable & Fruit Fair

Gender: There was a greater participation of male license holders in the four sectors studied, except for the Vegetable and Fruit Fair, where the majority (50.7%) were women. Male activity was more present at the Açaí Fair, and the Meat and Fish Markets, as the work in these places requires greater physical strength.

Age: The most representative age group in the sectors studied was adults, aged 29 to 39, except in the Meat Market, where most stallholders (27.6%) were 51 to 61.

Entrance to the fairs: In general, the entry to and the length of employment of these workers at the fairs are related to the influence of family or friends and/or the lack of other professional opportunities. Many Ver-o-Peso workers started working there through family and friends, and for many, it is a productive business.

Education: The majority of traders had access to primary education, with some having completed secondary education. The traders of the Meat Market represented the highest level of education, with the majority (58.6%) having completed the secondary level. In this last sector and at the Açaí Fair, some stallholders had an undergraduate degree. According to the researcher, obtaining financial resources from these workplaces may not correspond to the individual's education.

Monthly income: Most of those interviewed at the Vegetable and Fruit Fair (61.1%) and Açaí Fair (54.5%) receive monthly payments ranging from two to three minimum¹⁰⁵ wages (US\$ 570 to US\$ 855) and, in the case of the Fish Market and the Meat Market, from one to two salaries, US \$285 to US\$ 570 (56.5% and 62.1% of respondents, respectively).

According to Sousa and others (2017), these financial acquisitions may be one of the main factors that contribute to the permanence of these professionals in the complex.¹⁰⁶ The time of permanence in their locale of work varied from 1 to 10 years in the four sectors studied.¹⁰⁷ For most of the interviewees (86.6%), working at the market is the sole source of income, such that they dedicate an extensive amount of their time to the service.



Place of origin of permit holders: The majority of permit holders at the Vegetable and Fruit Fair (73.0%), Açaí Fair (69.7%), the Fish Market (73.9%), and the Meat Market (86.2%), come from the city of Belém, while the others come from municipalities in Pará, located close to the capital. The proximity of workers' homes to Ver-o-Peso allows them to earn a higher income, due to the reduction in personal and merchandise transportation costs.

Products sold: At the Fish Market, most respondents (56.5%) sell fish, and the minority (43.5%) sell shrimp. At the Açaí Fair, the 33 vendors (100%) exclusively sold fresh Açaí fruit. In the Vegetable and Fruit Fair, 59.2% sell fresh vegetables and fruits, while there are also traders of industrialized, processed, and manufactured products.



Açaí rasas / baskets and boats at the Dawn Market at Ver-o-Peso (by Púscia Imagens - stock.adobe.com)

Box 9: The Dawn Market: Açai Fair

The Açai Fair is an open-air single-product fair at Ver-o-Peso that takes place every day between midnight and 6 AM. Because of its hours, the Açai Fair is also known as “the Dawn Market”. All of the açai harvested in the forests and islands of the region goes through the fair. The daily stock is sold until around 6 AM at the Dawn Market, and then it is sent to other cities in Pará and other Brazilian states, as well as other countries.

The açai stock is brought by boat in *rasas* (craftily woven baskets used to transport açai), which are also used as a measure. The process of unloading the boats carried out by around 300 men, many of whom began their work lives there, and many of whom replace their parents or work alongside them.¹⁰⁸

The *rasas* are unloaded from the boats, which may be moored at the edge of the pier, when the tide is high; at the beginning of an access ramp to the pier or further away from it, when at high tide. At certain hours of the night or early morning, when the movement of boats arriving at the port is very intense, many boats

are only able to dock next to others that are already docked. When this happens, the baskets are thrown, one by one, from boat to boat, until they reach the dock.

After being landed, the fruit is sold to large and small buyers.¹⁰⁹ Marketers in the sector believe that at least 15 tons of açai circulate there daily. Some of this is for export, but a large part is for resale in Ver-o-Peso. Açai is very present in the Brazilian diet and especially in the diet of the inhabitants of Amazonia. The fruit comes from a palm tree typical of the Amazon region, where its consumption has occurred since Pre-Columbian times.

Açai is a rounded, dark purple fruit with a large seed and little pulp. The largest and densest areas of this palm tree are found in the Amazon River estuary, adapted to high temperature, rainfall, and relative humidity conditions.

Fruit production, which came almost exclusively from extractives, from the 1990s onwards, began to also be obtained from managed native açai groves and from crops planted in floodplain and dryland areas, located in regions with higher rainfall.¹¹⁰

The sale of blended açai in Ver-o-Peso is significant and is part of the high consumption rate of processed juice in Belém, estimated at no less than 170,000 liters per day. It also contributes to increasing the economy of Pará, the largest national producer in this segment, with 4,200 hectares planted with açai trees, which yield around 120 thousand tons annually.¹¹¹

At Ver-o-Peso, the fruit is processed into pulps and sweets that are sold in the Pulps Sector, or prepared as an accompaniment to fried fish in the Meals Sector. To be eaten together with fried fish, the açai fruit is blended in a machine and transformed into a paste. Açai seeds are also sold for planting or are sold already planted, at seedling sales, and at craft stalls.¹¹²

Although açai is the main product sold at this fair, the place is also used as a loading and unloading point for several other products at Ver-o-Peso and other fairs, supermarkets, and warehouses in Belém, such as cassava flour, oranges, pineapples, mangos, bananas, and jambo, ingá, and bacuri fruits.¹¹³



Box 10: Meal Sector

In the food sector of Ver-o-peso, there are many stalls selling various meals, snacks, and drinks. There are nine stalls that sell the popular açai smoothies with fish or shrimp. The movement in these stalls is intense at lunch-time, especially between 11AM and 2PM, when many workers from the market, commerce, and surrounding areas rush to the meal stalls in search of this traditional dish from Pará. To cope with the intense movement of customers, other vendors sell coffee, food, snacks, and porridge. In the bars adjacent to the fair, açai is served with fried fish, where music, drinks, and snacks liven up a night out.¹¹⁴

The food and bars sectors, which also include snack bars, together make up a perfect summary of Ver-o-Peso, where products and services from all production chains that lead to the market come together¹¹⁵. The daily and continuous movement of customers in these two sectors, at all shifts of the day and night, increases the commercial exchanges that are routinely carried

out between the market workers themselves and the surrounding area.¹¹⁶

In more than 130 stalls (boxes), primary products from the region's natural environment, acquired in various market sectors, are transformed into icons of the Pará culinary tradition.¹¹⁷ Very prominent figures in the food sales sector are the women who prepare and serve the food (see photos on the next page). They are popularly called "Boeiras".

The Ver-o-Peso food sector is a central place for restaurants in the center of Belém. There is a captive clientele who always seek out the market to have their meals, both daily and especially during festive seasons, such as the Círio de Nazaré or Christmas period.

In addition to the population of workers in the commercial district adjacent to Ver-o-Peso, a large part of the clientele at the food stalls are the vendors themselves who eat at the market.



It should also be noted that the production and sale of meals at Ver-o-Peso generates a series of economic activities in and around the market. Several inputs (açai, fish, duck, cassava, tucupi, vegetables, regional fruits) are purchased right there, largely from family production in nearby riverside municipalities. This configures product marketing networks through the so-called short circuits of the economy.¹¹⁸

The market's food sector contains subdivisions with specific activities, for example, facing Boulevard Castilhos França, there is the snack area, where snacks, juices, soft

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The food and bars sectors, which also include snack bars, together make up a perfect summary of Ver-o-Peso, where products and services from all production chains that lead to the market come together.”

drinks, sweets, and cakes are served in the morning and afternoon. There are also breakfast and porridge stalls, whose activities—including the sale of tapioca—start at 4AM. Farther ahead, as can be seen in the photos, are stalls selling açai with fried fish and meals based on rice, beans, pasta, salads, and various meats (fish, chicken, or beef), which are the main meals demanded.

On the market platform are the bars and snack bars subdivisions. In addition to meals, they also sell snacks and alcoholic drinks. They also operate during the night shift, capturing a public that leaves work in places close to the market and is looking for some fun.

Depending on the type of dish sold, the stalls (boxes) operate in different shifts throughout the 24 hours of the day, offering the corresponding food at each time: from 4AM onwards, coffee is served, with a form of porridge.

Tapiocinhas are served at around 10 or 11 in the morning, until lunch at around 2 PM, which is the busiest time. This is the time when many customers come to eat, or the stall owners arrange for hot food to be delivered to their offices, stores, or to the market stalls themselves.

In the late afternoon, beer and snack lovers arrive or even those who have dinner at Ver-o-Peso before heading home. There are also market traders who arrive at this time for their day, such as those who work in the sale of fish and açai that takes place during the early hours of the morning.¹¹⁹

Hygiene is a recurring concern for food workers as, according to them, this is an important prerequisite for attracting customers. In the fair's food sector, hygiene conditions are controlled by Belém City Hall's health department. Food is preserved at the fair in freezers installed in the stalls, where there are also sinks and taps with running water.



Box 11: Vegetable and Fruit Sector (Hortifrutigrangeiros)

The fruit and vegetable sector, known as the Vegetable and Fruit Fair (*hortifrutigrangeiros*), includes vegetables, legumes, condiments (spices), and fruits. The fruit sector is located adjacent to the vegetable area. The trade in vegetables, fruits, and condiments (spices) spreads across hundreds of points of sale in the Vegetable Sector, where there are 370 stalls with a variety of products. The busiest time in the area is early in the morning, when vendors from other markets, greengrocers, and grocery stores go there to buy various foodstuffs.

From 6 AM onwards, the public frequenting this sector begins to be made up of housewives, workers from Ver-o-Peso itself, and restaurant owners, who buy smaller quantities. The end of the shift varies depending on the day of the week and the season, but, in general, the work ends around 5 PM, from Monday to Friday, and at 11 AM on Saturdays and Sundays. Slowly, the traders lower a thick tarpaulin over their stalls.

The stalls are supplied with products purchased at Ceasa and brought to Ver-o-Peso by chartered kombi or truck - or a vehicle belonging to the stallholder himself. Some products, mainly foliage, also arrive through

the port of Ver-o-Peso, coming from the region of the islands, Abaetetuba and Barcarena.

Consumer demand in this sector is always high, but sellers are left with the challenge of dealing with the risk of product loss due to deterioration, which reaches an average rate of 10%.¹²⁰

The fruit sector, located adjacent to the vegetable sector, is made up of around 170 stalls. These are open on average from 6AM to 4PM, attracting all types of customers: local consumers, tourists, and the curious. What attracts customers the most are the regional food stalls such as abiu, chestnut *sapucaya*, araçá, ingá, and breadfruit, among others.

Many of the fruits on display at Ver-o-Peso are purchased there, directly from suppliers, especially at the Açaí Fair, but there is also an important supply that comes from CEASA.¹²¹ Over time, this sector has operated in different spaces of the complex—on the site of the current parking lot, in front of Solar da Beira, on Avenida Marquês de Pombal, behind Fish Market—until it was installed in its current location, adjacent to the Vegetable Fair, since the last renovation of the complex.

7. Conclusions and Lessons



Ver-o-Peso is a place of tradition with a historical density that encompasses relationships that go beyond the local space, where elements from the 19th century coexist within the current context. It is a place where, despite the changes that time has shaped in the complex, there are still old forms in prevalence. And it is a place where the social, political, economic, and cultural relations that transformed the place did not eliminate its essence.¹²²

This study has shown that over time, Ver-o-Peso changed its social function, from a place to collect taxes on exports and imports to being the largest public market in Latin America. This was in line with the changes undergone by the city of Belém, which directly influenced the Ver-o-Peso complex and its role in the context of the current urban image of Belém.¹²³

Many factors may have influenced the resilience of the Ver-o-Peso complex throughout Belém's urban development process. Among these we can mention the weight of **culture and tradition in the market**.

Above all, however, may be the fact that different market actors have **organized themselves into associations** to better defend their rights before city hall, joined with the fact that Belém's city government incorporated representatives from the various market traders' associations and other organizations into the complex's management process.

As discussed above, these associations have a constant dialogue with city hall through frequent meetings, where they present demands for improving services and maintenance.

They also **actively participate** in the planning and preparation of intervention projects proposed for the complex by the city hall or IPHAN.

As we have seen, the organization of the complex's space changed over time until it reached the configuration that exists today. The current spatial division is the result of cooperation between local workers and city hall. This division was made with the aim of facilitating consumer movement and improving consumer access to products. Today, the complex has 33 sectors divided according to the traditions and knowledge of the different professional groups that work there.

The **participation of the complex's workers**, through their respective associations, has also played an active role in planning and deciding working hours; the use of equipment, clothing and instruments; forms of supply and customer service; among other characteristics of the trades of the complex today.¹²⁴

Even with all its historical, cultural, tourist, socioeconomic importance, and despite the participatory management experience described in this study, there are still some problems that should be mentioned. For example, the degree of participation of associations in the management of Ver-o-Peso complex varies with the political line of the new elected mayors, and problems also exist with public safety and the maintenance of equipment, garbage collection, electricity, sanitation, among others.

Nevertheless, one of the main lessons that can be drawn from this case study of Ver-o-Peso is the fact that a **public market space**, managed by city hall, with an active participation of market traders' associations in its management process, can survive the accelerated process of urbanization and modernization of a city like Belém, while **preserving its tradition, culture, and customs**.

As a final conclusion, we hope that reading this document can in some way be useful in helping other city managers and stakeholders to preserve and improve the management of historic public markets in their cities.



8. Notes and References

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