



Producing urban space from below: Andean reciprocity as informal governance in an intermediary city

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ABSTRACT

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Intermediate cities in the Global South provide a critical setting for examining how migration and informality reshape urban governance. This study examines how internal migration and Andean reciprocity networks contribute to socio-spatial organization and informal governance in Juliaca, Peru. A qualitative ethnographic design was employed, combining participant observation, 30 in-depth interviews, and life histories with traders, community leaders, and local authorities. The findings reveal that kinship ties, regional affiliations, ayni-based reciprocity, trade union organizations, and community justice operate as durable governance mechanisms that regulate access to land, economic integration, conflict resolution, and territorial coordination beyond formal state planning. The study also identifies an emerging form of “informal modernity,” in which traditional reciprocity systems intersect with transnational trade networks and digitally mediated commercial practices. These findings challenge conventional approaches that equate informality with marginality, disorder, or state absence, demonstrating instead that informality constitutes a durable mode of socio-spatial production, collective organization, and grassroots governance. The study suggests that urban planning and governance in intermediary Andean cities should recognize community-based institutions, reciprocal networks, and grassroots self-governance as legitimate components of urban development. Integrating these social infrastructures into planning frameworks could contribute to more inclusive, context-sensitive, and locally grounded approaches to urban governance in rapidly transforming cities of the Global South.

Contribution/Originality: This study contributes original empirical evidence demonstrating that Andean reciprocity networks, migration, and grassroots organizations actively produce urban space and informal governance in an intermediary city. It reimagines informality as a robust socio-spatial infrastructure rather than as marginality, and advances debates on bottom-up urbanism, territorial governance, and planning in the Global South.

1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid growth of intermediary cities in the Global South has challenged traditional approaches to urbanism based on state planning, land formalization, and linear trajectories of modernization. Several studies show that current

dynamics of urban growth are increasingly linked to internal migration processes, informal economies, and other forms of territorial structuring that lie outside formal institutional frameworks (Gururani & Kennedy, 2021; Watson, 2021). In this context, therefore, the informal is not necessarily a transitory state but a structural dimension of urban production in large regions of Latin America, Africa, and Asia.

These processes take on peculiarities in the Andean region because of the persistence of systems of reciprocity, kinship, and community cooperation that continue to organize migrants' economic and social lives, even after their insertion into urban spaces (Malengreau, 2007; Zoomers & Otsuki, 2025). Far from disappearing with urbanization, these forms of organization are transferred and adapted to new urban scenarios, configuring support networks that facilitate access to employment, housing, trade, and collective protection (Gago, 2017).

The city of Juliaca is a highly relevant case for understanding these dynamics. It is one of the main commercial centers in southern Peru, and its growth is driven by intense migratory flows and an economy highly articulated with regional and cross-border circuits (Bellet & Cebrián, 2022). However, most of its urban growth has occurred outside the traditional tools of territorial planning, producing forms of social and spatial organization based on trade associations, kinship ties, and mechanisms for community self-management (Ziccardi & Dammert, 2021).

Despite the extensive literature on urban informality and migration, few studies analyze how Andean social institutions actively participate in the production of urban space and the configuration of territorial governance structures in intermediary cities. Most research still interprets these processes through approaches centered on marginality, precariousness, or institutional weakness, leaving in the background the organizational capacities and regulatory mechanisms developed by social actors themselves (Holston, 2021; Yiftachel, 2009).

Faced with this knowledge gap, the present study aims to analyze the processes of social reproduction of urban space in the city of Juliaca, examining how internal migratory flows and Andean networks of reciprocity contribute to the configuration of forms of territorial organization, informal governance, and socioeconomic reproduction. It is argued that the urban dynamics of Juliaca express a kind of informal modernity in which traditional practices of reciprocity coexist and are articulated with contemporary processes of commercial accumulation and global connectivity (Gago, 2017).

In light of this knowledge gap, this study answers the following research questions: How do internal migration flows and Andean reciprocity networks contribute to the social production of urban space in the intermediary city of Juliaca? How are informal governance and territorial organization beyond formal state planning shaped by kinship ties, practices of reciprocity, and migrant social networks? What are the implications of these grassroots organizational mechanisms for the understanding of urban governance and planning in intermediary cities of the Global South? Thus, this research aims to analyze the processes of social reproduction of urban space in Juliaca from the perspective of how internal migration and Andean reciprocity networks configure alternative forms of territorial organization, informal governance, and socioeconomic reproduction. The city's dynamics are advanced as a form of informal modernity in which traditional institutions of reciprocity coexist with contemporary processes of commercial accumulation and global connectivity, thus challenging the conventional reading of informality as a condition of marginality or institutional weakness.

2. THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

2.1. *Urbanization from Below and Social Production of Space*

The social production of space has been one of the most influential ways of understanding contemporary urban processes. From this point of view, space is not a neutral physical container but a social construction produced by power relations, daily practices, and struggles for control of territory. Lefebvre (1991) argues that urban reality is the product of the interaction between perceived space, conceived space, and lived space, dimensions that allow us to understand the tensions between institutional land-use planning projects and effective practices developed by social actors.

In cities in the Global South, these tensions are particularly relevant because large sectors of the population produce and manage territory through alternative mechanisms to formal planning frameworks. In this context, the notion of Third space developed by Soja (2000) allows us to interpret urban spaces as hybrid scenarios where material practices, symbolic representations, and forms of social resistance converge. In a complementary way, Harvey (2019) argues that the right to the city should be understood as the collective capacity to intervene in urbanization processes and redefine the conditions of production of urban space.

Various studies have shown that the expansion of urban peripheries in Latin America frequently responds to processes of self-construction, collective occupation, and community organization that reconfigure the urban structure beyond state interventions (Turner, 2018; Vega, 2021). From this perspective, the city is the result of a permanent negotiation between institutional and popular actors, with the latter serving as fundamental protagonists in the configuration of new economic and territorial centralities (Castells, 1983). This approach is particularly relevant for analyzing the urban dynamics of Juliaca, where the production of space is closely linked to processes of migration, popular trade, and union organization.

2.2. *Insurgent Citizenship and Informal Governance*

The emergence of alternative territorial regulations has been at the center of important debates about citizenship, governance, and urban power. Holston (2021) elaborates on the idea of insurgent citizenship to describe how historically marginalized groups generate their own forms of participation, territorial control, and vindication of rights outside traditional state forms. These forms of collective action are particularly evident in contexts of socio-spatial inequality and limited access to urban services.

Informal governance is understood as the set of norms, agreements, and mechanisms of social coordination that regulate collective life without relying solely on formal state institutions (Portes, 2006). These forms of regulation are often based on relationships of trust, reciprocity, and community recognition in the margins of cities, creating systems of authority with a high degree of local legitimacy.

More broadly, Gururani and Kennedy (2021) argue that urban peripheries are spaces where rural and urban logics, formal and informal actors, and local and global economic processes converge. In these contexts, governance involves not only state action but also a variety of actors who actively participate in regulating the territory. In a similar vein, Simone (2004) suggests that social networks can become real urban infrastructures, capable of ensuring the day-to-day functioning of the city when institutional capacities are limited. This view helps us understand the mechanisms of union organization and territorial control observed in Juliaca.

2.3. *Social Capital, Andean Reciprocity, and Migratory Networks*

The concept of social capital enables us to explain how social relations become strategic resources for economic integration and social reproduction. Bourdieu (1986) defines social capital as the sum of actual or potential resources connected to a durable network of relationships based on mutual recognition and trust. Such networks provide access to jobs, housing, credit, and other forms of protection during periods of uncertainty associated with internal migration.

In the Andes, practices of reciprocity form a central dimension of these social networks. Institutions such as “*ayni*,” “*minka*,” “*compadrazgo*,” and peasant relations continue to play relevant economic and social roles even after migratory processes (Cavagnoud, Guardia, & Rojas-Sandoval, 2025). These forms of cooperation make it possible to transfer material resources, information, and mutual support between rural and urban territories, strengthening the resilience of migrant households.

The persistence of these logics was identified early on by Matos Mar (2012), who described the expansion of Peruvian cities as a result of the so-called “popular overflow.” Subsequently, Franco (1999) proposed that this process gave rise to an “other modernity,” characterized by the articulation between Andean cultural practices and

contemporary market dynamics. Consequently, Andean urbanization should not be interpreted as a process of cultural substitution, but as a reconfiguration of traditional forms of social organization adapted to new urban contexts.

2.4. Coloniality, Marginality and Informal Modernity

Latin American urbanization unfolds within enduring historical and structural inequalities rooted in colonial legacies. Quijano (2000) theory of the coloniality of power argues that the hierarchies established during the colonial period continue to shape contemporary institutions, social imaginaries, and spatial organization. Consequently, urban development is characterized by persistent patterns of territorial exclusion and socio-spatial differentiation that disproportionately affect historically marginalized populations.

Within this perspective, Wacquant (2008) concept of territorial stigmatization explains how particular urban areas become socially constructed as spaces of poverty, informality, and insecurity, reinforcing both material deprivation and symbolic exclusion. Complementing this view, Sassen (2014) contends that contemporary globalization intensifies processes of social and territorial expulsion, displacing vulnerable populations and concentrating exclusion in peripheral urban areas. Together, these perspectives highlight that urban informality is not merely the result of institutional weakness but is deeply embedded in broader historical, political, and economic structures that shape uneven urban development.

In the face of these dynamics, various critical currents have highlighted the importance of organizational capacities built from below. Friedmann (1992) argues that community empowerment is a central element in the development of alternative forms of urban planning. Likewise, recent research questions the premise that the individual formalization of property is the only way to guarantee territorial security and urban development (Cockburn, 2025; Lombard & Horn, 2024). These perspectives, however, acknowledge that collective mechanisms of organization, reciprocity, and community defense can be effective sources of legitimacy and security of tenure, particularly in contexts of strong organizational density such as that found in Juliaca.

These theoretical perspectives provide important insights into urban informality, as well as important conceptual tensions. The classical modernisation and property formalisation perspectives tend to see informality as a transitional state arising from weak institutions and imperfect state regulation. They maintain that the urbanization process will ultimately move towards more formalized governance institutions. In contrast, critical urban theories, such as the social production of space, insurgent citizenship, grassroots urbanism, and Southern urbanism, conceptualize informality as a constitutive dimension of urbanization, in which marginalised actors actively produce space, authority, and institutional arrangements. Similarly, social capital theory highlights trust and cooperation as resources for collective action, while critical perspectives on urban governance focus on the political struggles and power asymmetries that shape territorial control. Instead of treating these views as mutually exclusive, this study discusses their complementarities and tensions by examining how reciprocity networks function as mechanisms of social solidarity, economic coordination, and political regulation in the urban setting of Juliaca.

2.5. Analytical Framework

These debates inform the development of an analytical framework for this research, which integrates four complementary dimensions: (i) the social production of space, referring to how everyday practices produce urban territories; (ii) Andean reciprocity and social capital, referring to the role of kinship, ayni, and migrant networks in mobilizing collective resources; (iii) informal governance, understood as locally legitimate systems of coordination that operate outside formal state institutions; and (iv) insurgent citizenship, referring to how grassroots organizations negotiate, contest, and redefine state authority. This integrated framework allows the empirical analysis to examine not only the interaction among these dimensions but also the reconfiguration of traditional Andean institutions under contemporary commercial and urban dynamics. The study therefore extends existing theories by showing that

reciprocity networks are not merely cultural residues or survival strategies but stable socio-spatial institutions that support urban governance and territorial reproduction in intermediary cities of the Global South.

We define informal governance in this paper as the set of locally legitimate rules, norms, organizational practices, and decision-making mechanisms through which social actors regulate collective life, allocate resources, settle conflicts, and coordinate territorial activities in the absence of, in parallel with, or in interaction with formal state institutions. This view considers informality not as a failure of governance but as an alternative institutional order based on trust, reciprocity, collective legitimacy, and social recognition. Four analytical dimensions empirically operationalize informal governance: (i) mechanisms of access to and regulation of urban land and commercial spaces; (ii) systems of conflict resolution and community sanctions; (iii) forms of collective leadership and organizational authority exercised by trade unions and community associations; and (iv) reciprocity-based networks that facilitate economic cooperation, information exchange, and collective action among migrant households. These dimensions constitute the categories of analysis that guide the collection, coding, and interpretation of data in the empirical analysis.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Approach and Design

This research adopted a qualitative approach based on the phenomenological-hermeneutical paradigm, aimed at understanding and interpreting the meanings that social actors attribute to their territorial practices, reciprocity strategies, and experiences of urban insertion (Heidegger, 2019). This approach is relevant for analyzing complex processes of the social construction of space, in which perceptions, narratives, and everyday relationships are central to the configuration of urban reality.

In the phenomenological-hermeneutical tradition, social reality is seen not as an objective reality independent of social actors but in terms of the meanings that individuals construct and negotiate in their everyday experiences. Phenomenology aims to explore lived experience from the perspective of the participants. Hermeneutics is concerned with interpreting these experiences within their historical, cultural, and social contexts. This combined perspective is particularly relevant for exploring how informal governance and socio-spatial practices are produced, justified, and reproduced in Juliaca by migrant traders and community organizations through their quotidian interactions and shared systems of reciprocity.

As this research is interpretive in nature, reflexivity and researcher positionality were key methodological considerations throughout the study. The research team comprised academics from the Peruvian Andes with extensive academic and professional experience in the Puno region, some of whom had deep knowledge of Juliaca's social and economic dynamics. This proximity facilitated access to community leaders, traders, and local organizations, but also necessitated continued reflexive awareness to limit assumptions arising from cultural familiarity. To ensure analytical credibility and minimize potential interpretive bias, the researchers kept reflexive field journals throughout the fieldwork and analysis, discussed emerging interpretations collectively, and systematically compared individual observations with interview narratives and documentary evidence.

The study was conducted using an ethnographic case study design. Juliaca was chosen as the case study because it is one of the main commercial centers in the Peruvian Andean south, with intense migratory flows, a strong presence of the informal economy, and the persistence of community forms of territorial organization. These characteristics make the city a privileged setting for analyzing the articulation of migration, Andean reciprocity, and socio-spatial production.

The methodological strategy sought to grasp the phenomenon in its natural context, including interactions among actors, institutions, and territorial practices. Fieldwork was undertaken from March 2024 to February 2025, for a total of twelve months. Ethnographic immersion lasted several weeks and included regular visits to the San José and Túpac Amaru markets, commercial fairs, neighbourhood meetings, and trade union assemblies, enabling long-

term observation of everyday interactions, governance practices, and reciprocity networks across different seasonal and commercial cycles.

3.2. Collection Techniques and Instruments

Interviews were conducted mainly in Spanish, although a few participants naturally switched between Spanish, Quechua, and Aymara throughout the interviews. Indigenous expressions or culturally specific concepts were preserved in the transcriptions and then translated into English while keeping their contextual meaning intact. Translation was conducted by bilingual researchers familiar with the sociocultural context of the Peruvian Andes, who paid special attention to concepts such as *ayni*, *minka*, *compadrazgo*, and other forms of reciprocity embedded in local culture, whose meanings transcend literal translation.

The collection of information combined various qualitative techniques to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon investigated and strengthen the triangulation of evidence.

- Participant observation: An immersion ethnography was developed in strategic spaces of economic and social interaction, including the markets of San José and Túpac Amaru, as well as various trade fairs in the city. The observation made it possible to record daily practices of cooperation, conflict-resolution mechanisms, forms of union organization, and processes of appropriation of urban space. The ethnographic observation followed an overt participant-observation strategy, whereby researchers openly identified themselves as academic investigators and informed participants of the objectives of the study before conducting observations. Ethnographic immersion extended over twelve months through regular weekly visits lasting between four and eight hours. In addition to the San José and Túpac Amaru markets, observations were conducted in neighborhood assemblies, trade union meetings, commercial fairs, wholesale distribution areas, transport terminals, public spaces surrounding the main markets, and municipal offices responsible for urban management. Observations focused on everyday interactions, negotiation practices, conflict-resolution mechanisms, territorial control, reciprocity exchanges, and relations between traders and public authorities.
- In-depth interviews: 30 semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected actors through purposive sampling. Participants included union leaders, first-generation migrant merchants, second-generation merchants, and officials of public institutions linked to urban management. The selection of informants was based on the criteria of experience, trajectory, and active participation in the territorial processes analyzed. The number of interviews was determined according to the theoretical saturation criterion, reached when new interviews ceased to provide relevant analytical categories. Data collection and analysis were conducted concurrently, and saturation was assessed iteratively and theoretically. After each round of interviews, emerging themes were coded and compared to determine whether new conceptual categories continued to emerge. Saturation was considered to have been reached when subsequent interviews confirmed existing categories and did not yield any new, meaningful insights for analysis. Saturation was reached at different points for each participant group, with approximately eight interviews with trade union leaders, nine with first-generation migrant traders, seven with second-generation traders, and six with public officials needed to achieve conceptual redundancy within each category. The final sample comprised 30 participants (19 men and 11 women) aged between 28 and 71 years. The participants displayed varied migratory trajectories from the provinces of Azángaro, Huancané, Moho, San Román, Lampa, and Melgar, with residence in Juliaca ranging from five to more than forty years, thus ensuring variation in migratory experience, occupational roles, and territorial engagement.
- Life stories: Moreover, the migratory routes considered emblematic for their ability to illustrate processes of social capital accumulation, economic mobility, and territorial consolidation were reconstructed. This technique enabled us to understand the intergenerational transformations and adaptation strategies developed by migrant households.

Semi-structured interview guides, field diaries, observation cards, and documentary records served as recording instruments during the ethnographic process.

3.3. Data Analysis Procedures

The study employed established qualitative quality criteria to strengthen the credibility of the findings, including extended engagement in the field, methodological triangulation, reflexive documentation, and iterative comparison of emerging categories across participant groups. Members of the research team discussed the preliminary interpretations until analytical consensus was reached, thus contributing to the credibility, dependability, and confirmability of the interpretive process.

The information was analyzed through a systematic process of coding, categorization, and hermeneutical interpretation. All interviews were transcribed, and the collected field notes and documents were organized using ATLAS.ti version 24 software.

In the first stage, open coding was performed to identify emerging units of meaning related to migration, reciprocity, informal governance, access to land, and union organization. In the next step, the categories and subcategories were related through axial coding, which made it possible to construct interpretative patterns of the processes of social reproduction of urban space.

A qualitative analysis of social networks was also introduced to identify links of cooperation, leadership, and authority within union and community structures. This procedure allowed for the visualization of the relationships that sustain the mechanisms of coordination and territorial control observed in the city.

The narratives were analyzed using discourse analysis techniques to understand the actors' perceptions of the State, informality, and collective organization. We were particularly interested in the tensions between representations of the "absent State" and the "intrusive State," recurrent categories in the collected testimonies.

Triangulation was applied at both the data collection and analytical levels. Participant observation, semi-structured interviews, life histories, documentary materials, and field notes were systematically compared through iterative coding in ATLAS.ti. Analytical matrices were developed to examine convergence and divergence across data sources for all emerging categories. Where inconsistencies arose, for example, between the views of traders and public officials, they were not seen as inconsistencies to be resolved but as analytically significant articulations of competing understandings of governance, territorial authority, and legitimacy. We included these conflicting accounts in the analysis to better understand the coexistence of formal and informal institutional orders in Juliaca.

All interview recordings, transcripts, field notes, and documentary materials were anonymized and stored in encrypted, password-protected digital repositories accessible only to the research team. Owing to the sensitive nature of the data, including informal economic practices and local governance arrangements, complete interview transcripts are not publicly available to protect participants' confidentiality. However, the coding framework, code definitions, analytical categories, and selected anonymized interview excerpts supporting the main findings are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request, subject to ethical approval and confidentiality agreements. This approach facilitates methodological transparency and enables the verification and replication of the analytical procedures while safeguarding participants' identities.

Finally, a triangulation methodology was used that integrated information from observations, interviews, life histories, and institutional documents. This procedure made it possible to compare perspectives, reinforce the interpretative consistency of the findings, and increase the credibility of the results obtained. All interview recordings, transcripts, field notes, and documentary material were anonymised and stored in encrypted, password-protected digital repositories accessible only to the research team. During transcription, personal identifiers were removed to ensure participants' confidentiality. Due to the sensitive nature of the interviews, namely, informal economic activities and local governance practices, the complete transcripts are not available to the public. Anonymised excerpts and

coding procedures are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request, subject to ethics approval and confidentiality agreements with participants.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Power Networks and Organizational Resilience among Merchants

Table 1 shows that the power network of unions in Juliaca is characterized by a differentiated distribution of functions among actors, in which organizational authority derives not only from formal leadership positions but also from the strategic location that each node occupies within the network. Union leaders are the main articulating actors; their high degree of betweenness centrality allows them to mediate the flow of information between grassroots organizations and external institutions, coordinate collective decision-making, and validate the inclusion of new members in commercial associations. They act as brokers, play a central role in resolving conflicts, and negotiate territories.

The family nucleus is the most tightly knit part of the network. The high local density of these networks reflects strong kinship ties, which allow for the circulation of trust, labor, commercial information, and financial support through mechanisms of reciprocity such as *ayni*. Such family-based clusters reduce the uncertainty of migration and commercial activity by offering seed capital, employment opportunities, and social protection, thereby increasing the resilience of household economies.

At a medium level, *paisanos'* associations organize social relations around a common territorial origin. The clustering structure of these networks implies that migrants from the same province or district are likely to share dense cooperation networks, which, in turn, delineate the city's commercial sectors. These associations help reinforce collective identity and provide avenues for mutual protection, access to market opportunities, and coordination of collective responses to external pressures, such as state interventions or competition from non-members.

The arrival of second-generation (2G) merchants constitutes a new structural element in the network. The high centrality of these ties points to their role in connecting traditional organizational structures with external commercial circuits, digital technologies, and national or international suppliers. These actors do not displace traditional reciprocity networks; rather, they help the network adapt by incorporating technological innovation, digital commerce, and formal business practices into existing community-based organizational arrangements.

In sum, the network metrics indicate that the exercise of union power in Juliaca is embedded in a complementary organizational structure, where leadership, family reciprocity, territorial identity, and generational innovation represent different but interrelated roles. Such a structure makes the network internally cohesive, yet sensitive to changing commercial circumstances and capable of extending its links beyond the local scale.

Table 1. Metrics of centrality and the role of nodes in the network of union power in the city of Juliaca.

Network Node	Primary Connection Attribute	Centrality Metric (Interpretation)	Role within the Governance Network
Union Leader (Central Broker)	Kinship ties, compadrazgo, leadership legitimacy, and collective mobilization	High betweenness centrality: mediates information flows and coordinates interactions between grassroots organizations and external actors.	Resolves conflicts, legitimizes membership, coordinates collective decisions, and represents organizations in negotiations with public institutions.
Family Networks (Kinship Clusters)	Blood relationships, inheritance of commercial spaces, and reciprocal obligations	High network density: cohesive clusters characterized by strong trust and frequent interaction.	Provide seed capital, labor, social protection, and reciprocity (<i>ayni</i>), facilitating business continuity and household resilience (Cavagnoud et al., 2025).

Network Node	Primary Connection Attribute	Centrality Metric (Interpretation)	Role within the Governance Network
Associations of Paisanos	Shared territorial origin (e.g., Moho, Huancané, Ayaviri) and migrant identity	High clustering coefficient: geographically and socially cohesive groups that organize commercial sectors.	Strengthen collective identity, facilitate mutual assistance, coordinate territorial control, and protect members from external pressures (Zoomers & Otsuki, 2025).
Second-Generation (2G) Merchants	Technical education, digital skills, and external commercial networks	High closeness centrality: connect traditional organizational networks with national and international markets.	Introduce technological innovation, modernize logistics, diversify supply chains, and create bridges between informal organizations and formal market institutions (Gago, 2017).

Note: Analysis based on the density of references to kinship ties and assembly commitments identified across eight trade-union assembly meetings conducted in the San José and Túpac Amaru market associations.

The testimonies collected show that authority is based on mechanisms of trust, reciprocity, and community commitment that strengthen the internal cohesion of organizations. The main criteria for recognizing leadership are seniority in the occupation of commercial premises, stable participation in collective activities, and compliance with communal duties. In this way, communal tasks, economic contributions, and attendance at assemblies are mechanisms of social validation that reinforce internal hierarchies and ensure organizational continuity.

In the same vein, the data suggest that union norms are not merely formal rules but are highly correlated with dominant moral codes. Violations of collective agreements and non-observance of community responsibilities are often considered violations of the principles of solidarity and loyalty, which support the organization. Thus, trade-union authority not only regulates economic activities but also plays a central role in the reproduction of social norms, conflict resolution, and the preservation of internal order.

These findings indicate that trade union organizations of Juliaca operate as spaces of local governance, in which authority arises from the interplay of social capital, reciprocity, and collective recognition. Therefore, union leadership can be understood as a fundamental resource for territorial coordination and for the reproduction of forms of urban organization constructed from below, in a context where community relations continue to be central to the regulation of economic and social life.

"If the leader says that we close, we all close. It's not out of fear; it's because if you open up, you weaken the base" (Interview A1, market leader).

The category of access to land or space emerges as the most disputed resource. In the city of Juliaca, land or space is acquired and defended through "factual possession," endorsed by the guild (Tome, 2021). In Table 2, the analysis shows that the informal legitimacy granted by the trade union organization carries more weight than the state property title. For these actors, the market and the neighborhood constitute an extension of their collective property.

"So that no one goes beyond the designated area, we have clearly marked the boundaries with yellow paint... Whoever does not comply, the merchandise is confiscated until he pays for his fault" (Interview A4, street leader).

This appropriation extends to infrastructure:

"We ourselves brought the ballast for the street... With what right are they now going to come and send us away?" (Interview A5).

This behavior provides a typical illustration of Lefebvre (1991) theory of the social production of space. The "spatial practice" of trade is thus disrupted by state interventions, which leaders oppose (Vega, 2021). Resistance is not anarchic but is a defense of the "Right to the City" (Harvey, 2019), in which legitimacy is gained through physical confrontation and the collective defense of territory (Caulkins, 2022). In the same way, belonging is based on ancestral networks.

"I am a leader because my family founded this neighborhood... if you do not serve the base, the base does not obey you" (Interview A7, market leader).

The application of direct sanctions reflects a search for efficiency in informal law that the formal judicial and police systems do not provide.

"We solve our problems in assembly. If there is a lawsuit over boundaries, it is settled in front of everyone. Whoever lies or tries to steal a place is made to carry stones or is given his whip. Calling the police wastes time and gives them money for pleasure." (Interview A3, market leader)

This meaning of *"justice"* as the immediate and sovereign restitution of order constitutes an expression of *"Insurgent Citizenship"* (Holston, 2019), motivated by the structural abandonment of the State.

Table 2. Definition of categories and codes of analysis for the study of migration, reciprocity networks, and the social reproduction of space in the city of Juliaca.

A Priori Category	Analytical Dimension	Code	Operational Definition
I. Insurgent Territorial Autonomy	Informal Territorial Regulation	AUT-REG	Community rules governing access to, use of, and control over commercial spaces independently of formal state regulations.
	Resistance to State Intervention	AUT-RES	Collective actions opposing or negotiating municipal interventions, including the defense of self-managed territories.
	Community Justice	AUT-JUS	Locally recognized mechanisms for conflict resolution and enforcement based on assemblies, collective sanctions, and customary authority.
II. Social Capital and Reciprocity	Kinship and Migrant Networks	REC-KIN	Trust-based relationships established through kinship, compadrazgo, and shared territorial origin (e.g., Moho, Huancané, Azángaro, Ayaviri).
	Ayni and Mutual Reciprocity	REC-AYN	Reciprocal exchanges of labor, knowledge, commercial opportunities, or market spaces without immediate monetary compensation.
	Informal Collective Finance	REC-FIN	Rotating savings, informal credit, and collective financial arrangements based on trust and verbal commitments.
III. Translocality and Spatial Duality	Rural Embeddedness	TRA-RUR	Maintenance of agricultural land, productive activities, and family ties in rural communities as sources of security and identity.
	Symbolic Recognition	TRA-SYM	Social prestige acquired through urban commercial success and reaffirmed through participation in community festivals and collective obligations in the place of origin.
	Food and Livelihood Security	TRA-FOO	Continued reliance on rural resources and agricultural production to cope with periods of urban economic or political instability.
IV. Second-Generation Subjectivities	Strategic Professionalization	GEN-PRO	Application of higher education, digital technologies, and managerial knowledge to improve family-based informal enterprises.
	Urban Aspirations and Spatial Perceptions	GEN-URB	Perceptions of the inherited commercial environment, balancing appreciation of community organization with aspirations for improved urban infrastructure and modernization.
V. Hybrid Governance (State–Community Relations)	Institutional Distrust	GOV-DIS	Perception of public institutions as inefficient, extractive, or illegitimate in the provision of urban services and territorial regulation.
	Negotiated Governance	GOV-NEG	Decision-making processes based on negotiation and agreements between municipal authorities and grassroots organizations rather than unilateral state planning.

The Insurgent Territorial Autonomy category is theoretically grounded in Holston (2021)'s notion of insurgent citizenship, which conceptualizes grassroots collective action as a process through which marginalized groups construct alternative forms of political authority and territorial regulation outside formal state institutions. In Juliaca, these practices also relate to broader scholarship on urban social movements, in which collective organization, territorial defense, and community self-management are mechanisms for negotiating urban governance and claiming

the right to the city (Castells, 1983; Harvey, 2019). This theoretical link helped interpret the analytical categories presented in Table 2.

For the leaders, the market and neighborhood are not simply places of transit but extensions of their collective property. This idea is reflected in their strict physical control of the space:

"So that no one goes over the position, we have the boundaries well marked with yellow paint... Whoever does not comply, has the merchandise confiscated until he pays for his fault" (Interview A4).

The setting of these limits and surveillance at 6 a.m. constitutes a system of "space conceived from below" (Turner, 2018) in which actors behave this way because they feel that the municipal order is alien and unaware of their daily reality. This appropriation includes basic infrastructure:

"We ourselves have brought the ballast for the street and provided security. By what right are they going to come and send us away now?" (Interview A5), reinforcing the idea that "the market is our home, and we set the rules" (Interview A2).

This behavior manifests Lefebvre (1991) social production of space. Leaders reject state interventions because they disrupt the "spatial practice" of trade. In this regard, an informant pointed out:

"When they wanted to put barriers along the avenue... We told them: traffic is respected, but commerce must not be touched. In the end, they had to withdraw their project" (Interview A6).

Resistance is not anarchic but a defense of the "right to the city" (Harvey, 2019), where legitimacy is earned through physical confrontation: "respect is won in the street" (Interview A1). Similarly, membership is based on founders' networks.

"I am a leader because my family has been the founder of this neighborhood... if you don't serve the base, the base doesn't obey you" (Interview A7), supported by the fact that "many of us are relatives, compadres... trust is between countrymen" (Interview A8).

The application of direct sanctions responds to a search for efficiency that the formal judicial system does not provide.

"We solve our problems in assembly. If there is a lawsuit over boundaries, it is measured in front of everyone. Anyone who lies or wants to steal a place is punished with a fine or is given his whip. Calling the police is wasting time and giving them money for pleasure." (Interview A3)

This meaning of "justice" as the immediate restitution of order constitutes "Insurgent Citizenship" (Holston, 2019), motivated by state abandonment.

"The thief does not enter here because he knows that he will not come out... The State does not take care of us, and we have to take care of our working capital" (Interview A4).

4.2. Networks, Social Capital, and Economic Resilience among Migrants

The success of first-generation migrants is based on "Social Capital" (Bourdieu, 1986). The concept replaces the formal contract.

"Now everything is with money, but the word is still valid. We lent each other merchandise without signing anything, just because we are from the same town" (Interview B7).

Actors operate under this logic because interpersonal trust and kinship are their only insurance in a risky environment.

"Juliaca consumes you. You need people who support you" (Interview B6).

Urban Ayni and Andean reciprocity are observed in urban insertion, as a merchant relates.

"When I came from my community, my aunt gave me a little corner in her stall to start. That is Ayni: today for you, tomorrow for me. Now I also help my nephews" (Interview B3).

"These informal institutions are the engine of local development (Portes, 2006), consolidating the Popular Overflow (Matos Mar, 2012), where growth is obtained through collective savings "boards" in the absence of formal bank credit.

"We got together with ten acquaintances; it is pure trust" (Interview B2).

This resilience has allowed many to go from being *"pawns in the village"* to *"owners of their stall"* (Interview B4), feeling that the city gave them *"what the government never gave me: a dignified life"* (Interview B9).

The identity of the merchant is inherently dual; Juliaca is for the reproduction of capital, but the field is existential and ontologically secure.

"I have my house here in Juliaca: the first floor is a warehouse, and the second is a store. But my land in the community is still sown... My children do not understand that the earth is the only thing that never fails you" (Interview B8, market trader).

This *"other modernity"* (Franco, 1999) or *"hybrid modernity"* enables economic resilience: in the face of intense urban crises, migrants take refuge in their communities of origin.

"If things get ugly here because of the strikes, we will return to the town. There are always potatoes and chuño" (Interview B10).

Urban success is reinvested in social prestige and rural ritual, since *"Juliaca gives me wealth, but in the village I am the Mayordomo"* (Interview B5), thereby maintaining the active balance between *"Juliaca for money, the countryside for resting"* (Interview B1).

4.3. Economic Autonomy and Informal Commerce among Migrant Descendants

The children of migrants choose trade not because of limited career options, but in an active search for autonomy.

"In an office, they would pay me little and send me away. Here, I am my own boss; I already manage everything with my laptop and social networks" (Interview C2).

Urban growth in Peru has been accompanied by expansion processes that frequently exceed the institutional capacities of territorial planning and regulation. Various studies have indicated that the occupation of urban land is influenced by dynamics of informality, partially regulated land markets, and community self-management mechanisms that operate in parallel with formal land-use planning instruments (Peirano, de la Flor Sáenz, & Astucuri, 2023). In this context, informality cannot be understood only as a condition of precariousness, but also as a strategy for adaptation in the face of perceived limitations in state action.

The testimonies collected during the fieldwork show an ambivalent relationship between economic actors and public institutions. Some interviewees acknowledge the need for infrastructure, security, and urban services, but distrust state interventions, particularly when they involve mechanisms of control, supervision, or sanction. As one of the traders interviewed pointed out, the State is often seen as an entity that intervenes mainly to impose restrictions or fines (Interview C1). These perceptions contribute to reinforcing alternative models of economic and territorial organization based on social networks of trust and cooperation.

Similarly, the selection of a place like Juliaca to move to and carry out economic activities is determined by other motivations beyond normal job prospects. The interviewees emphasize aspects that are favorable to entrepreneurship and economic mobility, such as the intensity of commercial activity, the rapid circulation of capital, and the presence of large social support networks. "Lima is very cold for business there; here money travels fast" (Interview C6). This evaluation reveals the importance of territorial perceptions for the development of migratory and economic strategies.

The results also show the transformation processes of the economic and social habitus of urban actors (Bourdieu, 1986). What we see are not practices in opposition between tradition and modernity but rather an increasing articulation between traditional forms of reciprocity and the deployment of digital technologies for commercial management, logistics coordination, and market expansion. This combination allows traders to retain organisational forms based on trust and kinship while introducing instruments related to increasingly globalised economic circuits:

"I want to automate sales; I use Excel and follow suppliers on AliExpress" (Interview C3).

Territorial stigmatization remains (Wacquant, 2008); young people are asking for a physically modern city because they are irritated by the fact that "there are no sidewalks, that everything is dirt" (Interview C7), which

represents an aesthetic rupture with their parents. The difficulty of being formal lies in the fact that *“the system throws you out... they ask you for impossible requirements”* (Interview C4), *preferring to pay voluntary fees to the union rather than taxes that “are not seen in real works”* (Interview C8).

Juliaca is understood as a *Thirdspace* (Soja, 2000), a node of unlimited global flows:

“Where others see disorder, I see a market that never sleeps” (Interview C5).

The motivation here is to take advantage of the velocity of money circulation in an environment that rewards and legitimizes the “awakened.”

4.4. The Impotence of the State and the Conflict of Orders

Municipal authorities perceive a *“parallel government”* in which technical planning and urban zoning are systematically ignored.

“We can have a well-made urban development plan, but when we reach the expansion zone, the leader has already parceled and sold everything” (Interview D2).

The impossibility of enforcing the law is due to the union’s strength and substantial cohesion.

“If we send the municipal ... the next day we have thousands of merchants surrounding the municipality” (Interview D4).

This reality creates a de facto “state of exception” (Agamben, 2005) in which the formal authority has to negotiate its own existence in the territory. The breakdown of communicative action (Habermas, 1984) is the result of profound mistrust.

“The people of Julia do not want to pay taxes because they distrust the municipality” (Interview D3).

The coloniality of power (Quijano, 2000) explains the citizens’ “rebelliousness” toward formal authority (Interview D1), which is considered an extractive structure that only seems to critique or sanction but does not offer real solutions to urban crises such as periodic floods.

Table 3. Matrix of categorization and interpretative findings by groups of informants.

Participant Group	Dominant Analytical Theme	Illustrative Evidence (Representative Quotations)	Analytical Interpretation
Group A: Union Leaders	Territorial Autonomy and Collective Governance	“Here, the mayor does not impose the rules—we do. The market is our home.” (E-A2)	Commercial spaces are collectively governed through locally recognized institutions. Legitimacy to lead does not come from formal state authority but from common pasts of organizing together and defending territory.
Group B: First-Generation Migrants	Reciprocity and Translocal Livelihoods	“Juliaca is for earning money; the countryside is for healthy food... the land is the only thing that never fails you.” (E-B1; E-B8)	Migrants sustain translocal livelihoods by blending urban commercial pursuits with continuing economic, social, and symbolic connections to rural communities, thus enabling household resilience.
Group C: Second-Generation Traders	Generational Change and Informal Modernity	“I am an engineer, but I prefer applying my knowledge to logistics... The State feels like an adversary.” (E-C5; E-C1)	Family enterprises combine higher education and digital competencies, a manifestation of the modernization of informal economic practices that retain organizational autonomy and community-based networks.
Group D: Public Authorities	Hybrid Governance and Institutional Tensions	“Juliaca is governed through agreements, not only through laws... They have a parallel government.” (E-D4; E-D2)	Public officials recognize that urban governance operates through continuous negotiation with grassroots organizations, revealing the coexistence of formal planning institutions and community-based systems of territorial regulation.

Note: Bracketed codes (e.g., E-A2) identify the interview number and the corresponding group (A: Leaders; B: 1st Generation; C: 2nd Generation; D: Authorities).

The analysis of the narratives systematized in Table 3 reveals a profound reconfiguration of Andean territoriality and reproductive strategies in light of the State’s aspirations for domination in Juliaca. On the one hand, the voice of union leaders displaces the principle of formal legality through the establishment of a self-managed order in which public space is reappropriated under the domestic metaphor of the “collective house”; its legitimacy derives not from

legal norms but from the customary law of physical occupation and community resistance. This grassroots sovereignty is organically articulated with the practices of first-generation migrants, who sustain a modern “archipelago economy” by dismantling the classic linear dichotomy between rural and urban areas. For this group, the city is merely a node for instrumental and pragmatic monetary accumulation, while the community of origin is preserved as an existential, identity-based, and food-related anchor, crucial for cushioning the vulnerability and precariousness of the informal city.

On the other hand, the study demonstrates a strategic generational change and the subsequent capitulation of public institutions, which eventually strengthens fragmented sovereignty. Second-generation professionals, instead of using their university education as a channel for assimilation into formal, salaried labor markets, configure an “enlightened informality” by instrumentalizing their technical skills to sophisticate, shield, and expand family economies beyond the state’s radar, which they perceive as an intrusive and supervisory force. This technical insubordination and the consequent withdrawal from official legality force local authorities themselves to recognize the impotence of the state apparatus; their discourse confesses that the governability of Juliaca is based on *de facto* informal pacts, rather than abstract laws, formalizing a paralegality in which the bureaucrat must permanently negotiate with unions and popular assemblies to ensure the territory’s minimum functioning.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1. Territorial Autonomy and Union Control

The results show that in Juliaca, territorial autonomy is sustained through collective organizational arrangements rather than formal administrative structures. Union organizations are not a response to the lack of institutions, but institutions that perform governance functions by regulating access to commercial space, mediating conflicts, enforcing collective rules, and legitimizing leadership through kinship, *compadrazgo*, and trajectories of collective struggle (5). Such findings support (Lefebvre, 1991) assertion that urban space is produced through everyday social practices rather than through state planning. The appropriation of territory visible in the markets reflects the construction of spaces whose legitimacy is built through continuous social interaction and collective investment. This supports the notion of a self-generated urban order from below.

The evidence also supports (Harvey, 2019) interpretation of the ‘right to the city’ as the capacity of organized social actors to shape urban development according to their own priorities. Consequently, resistance to municipal interventions should be read not as opposition to planning as such, but as a defence of collectively produced territorial arrangements that traders themselves consider more legitimate and effective than externally imposed regulations. In this sense, the assemblies, community sanctions, and negotiated agreements are instruments for conflict resolution and express management through institutions recognized locally, rather than solely through the authority of the State.

These findings also resonate with Holston (2019)’s notion of insurgent citizenship. However, in contrast to cases where insurgent practices primarily involve political claims for inclusion, the Juliaca case suggests that informal governance has been institutionalized as a relatively stable system of territorial regulation. In other words, leadership legitimacy is not granted by political representation alone; rather, it is constructed through years of engagement in collective struggles and demonstrated dedication to the well-being of the community. In doing so, the study contributes to debates on grassroots urbanism by showing that union organizations are enduring governance institutions that coexist, negotiate, and sometimes contest formal planning systems.

The findings of this research consistently support the claim that informality in the Global South is not a temporary aberration or an incidental failure of development; rather, it constitutes a structured and largely stable form of urban production (Villamar & Braz, 2025). In this sense, the findings in Juliaca converge strongly with the global research of Mitlin (2008), who argues that self-management and the co-production of services constitute survival infrastructures that compensate for the chronic inaction of local governments. When informants (Groups A

and B) report that they themselves "*brought the ballast for the street*" and "*provided security*," the concept of *people as infrastructure*, coined by Simone (2004), is validated: in contexts of material precariousness, communal cohesion and human support networks physically structure the territory and assume functions that theoretically correspond to the State.

About access to land and housing, the results coincide with the critical perspective of Lombard and Horn (2024), who theorize that the legitimacy of land tenure in informal contexts does not come from a legal, individual title granted by the State, but from the daily, factual, and collective recognition of the community. The documented ethnographic use of the "*social certificates*" granted by the guilds in Juliaca and the defense of boundaries painted with yellow paint empirically support this notion, also aligning with the *Thirdspace* theory of Soja (2000) and *insurgent planning*, as conceptualized by Castells (1983), in which the space of otherness created by marginalized sectors directly challenges the Cartesian zoning of central planning.

Likewise, there is substantial overlap with the Andean translocality and multilocality dynamics documented by Zoomers and Otsuki (2025). The rural roots of the Juliaca merchant (Group B), characterized by maintaining crops in the community as ontological and for food security, confirm that the contemporary migrant operates under a multispatial and hybrid logic defined by Andean markets governed by kinship and translocal reciprocity. This behavior validates the persistence of the social capital and *habitus* classically proposed by Bourdieu (1986) and Coleman (1988), demonstrating that traditional Andean networks are strategic assets for financial accumulation and protection against urban crises, as systematized by Gago (2017) under the concept of "neoliberalism from below".

The main and most resounding divergence that emerges from the results of this research is directed against the classical paradigm of the formalization of property proposed by De Soto (1986). For De Soto (1986), individual titling of private property is the only mechanism that allows for "unlocking" capital and guaranteeing the legal security of the informal inhabitant. However, qualitative testimonies in Juliaca show that individual titling promoted by state programs is not only perceived with distrust because it is considered a mechanism for punitive tax collection, but, in practice, it is displaced by a parallel collective property structure that enjoys greater legitimacy and real security (the guild and the neighborhood council). The results are more in line with the criticisms of (Bourgois, 2003; Cockburn, 2025), who demonstrate that the individualist and privatist approach of neoliberal titling clashes head-on with the collective ontologies and the union logics of reciprocity that effectively govern the Andean soil, where security of tenure does not depend on formal civil registration, but on social mobilization and the factual defense of space.

On a political-administrative level, the findings in Juliaca strongly challenge models of "*hybrid governance*" usually applied to developing peripheries in other latitudes. While classic authors of governance and scholars of African cities assume that urban peace and stability are achieved when the state apparatus recognizes and organically assimilates informal authorities by integrating them into its command structure, in Juliaca, what Yiftachel (2009) calls fragmented and conflicting sovereignty prevails. The local municipality (Group D) does not assimilate the union leaders but permanently capitulates to their territorial control out of fear of a massive "*popular overflow*" that would paralyze the city. This is more similar to what Agamben (2005) theorizes as a de facto permanent "state of exception," in which the law is suspended to make way for forced negotiation.

5.2. Social Capital, Reciprocity, and Translocal Networks

The empirical evidence shows that social capital is one of the main mechanisms explaining migrant incorporation into the urban economy of Juliaca. Social capital, in the same way as Bourdieu (1986), is an accrued resource embedded in long-lasting networks of kinship, trust, and reciprocity, and is a means of gaining access to commercial opportunities that are not accessible through formal institutions. The widespread use of verbal contracts, merchandise credits, and collective savings arrangements fits with Portes (2006) assertion that informal institutions tend to compensate for the lack of formal institutional support in settings where formal financial systems are not readily available.

However, the findings indicate that Andean reciprocity transcends common conceptions of social capital. Practices such as *ayni*, family cooperation, and *compadrazgo* are not simply means of economic exchange but, rather, long-standing institutional arrangements through which migrants organize production, distribute risks, and reproduce social cohesion across generations. In this sense, the case of Juliaca corroborates Matos Mar (2012) interpretation of *desborde popular*, insofar as urban expansion is built on organizational forms that are culturally rooted, rather than solely on spontaneous informal entrepreneurship.

The importance of contemporary ideas about migration is complicated by translocal relationships. At the same time, migrants also maintain commercial investments in Juliaca and productive, symbolic, and ritual ties with their communities of origin. This dual territoriality defies linear models of rural-to-urban transition and shows that mobility produces multilocal livelihoods rather than permanent territorial substitution. Urban commercial accumulation and rural reciprocity are thus complementary rather than competing systems, building resilience in times of economic uncertainty. In this sense, the relevance of the concept of “another modernity” of Franco (1999) is reiterated, since economic modernity is intertwined with enduring Andean institutions that still regulate social life and collective identity.

Empirical evidence shows that the governance of the city of Juliaca is based on a complex network of social relations among union members, families, and communities. These structures do not follow a logic of disorder but function according to mechanisms of coordination and authority that regulate access to resources, conflict resolution, and the defence of collective interests. Trade union leaders play a key role in this set-up as strategic intermediaries among traders, local organizations, and state institutions. They mediate information, mobilize collective action, and negotiate with external actors, which gives them a leadership position beyond the formal frameworks of representation, creating forms of local authority closely linked to what Holston (2021) refers to as insurgent citizenship.

Kinship and peasant relations are also among the most important mechanisms of social cohesion and economic reproduction. These networks allow for the exchange of information, the pooling of resources, and the building of trust among community members, thereby reducing transaction costs and strengthening collective strategies of protection in the face of uncertain scenarios (Cavagnoud et al., 2025; Coleman, 1988). The persistence of translocal ties with communities of origin confirms that migratory mobility does not mean a rupture with rural territories, but rather the construction of multilocal social spaces that simultaneously link urban and rural spaces (Malengreau, 2007; Zoomers & Otsuki, 2025).

The results also suggest that this transformation of organizational structures is undertaken by new generations of merchants. Young people do not abandon family economic networks but incorporate technical knowledge, digital tools, and contemporary marketing strategies that expand the scope of popular economic circuits. This process reveals the coexistence of traditional forms of reciprocity and the dynamics of economic globalization, constituting a modality of informal modernity (Gago, 2017; Kanai & Schindler, 2022). Finally, the results indicate that the production and regulation of territory in Juliaca rest on forms of social organization that go beyond conventional urban planning approaches. Thus, networks of reciprocity, kinship, and union organization have become established social infrastructure that organizes the economic and territorial life of the city, rather than serving as a short-term response to institutional weakness. Therefore, any approach to urban governance oriented toward similar contexts must recognize the role of these collective structures as key actors in the processes of socio-spatial production and urban development (Watson, 2021). The analysis of the interviews and the assembly minutes shows that union authority is one of the main mechanisms of mediation and social regulation in the markets and commercial organizations of Juliaca. Leaders are not merely administrative figures but also strategic actors within networks of relationships derived from kinship, shared migratory paths, and forms of collective recognition. Their legitimacy is based not only on organizational or management competence but also on their trajectory within the organization, participation in its founding processes, and ability to represent and protect the interests of the collective (Ziccardi & Dammert, 2021).

5.3. *Generational Dynamics and "Informal Modernity"*

Experiences among second-generation traders suggest that urban informality is being transformed rather than declining. Higher education, digital technologies, and international commercial ties have not replaced traditional organizational forms but have added to them, creating new forms of economic coordination that combine technological innovation with governance based on reciprocity. This finding contradicts the traditional view of modernization, which assumes that formalization replaces informal institutions. The evidence, instead, suggests that the two systems coexist through adaptive hybridization. Popular economies, as Gago (2017) calls them, such as digital platforms, international supply chains, and technological management practices, can articulate local social relations with global circuits of capital. Young traders function as strategic brokers between community organizations and transnational markets, enhancing the adaptive capacity of existing organizational networks without eroding their collective bases. They do not abandon family businesses; instead, they introduce new commercial practices and maintain reciprocity networks that provide legitimacy, confidence, and organizational support.

One important difference between acceptance of informal governance and expectations about urban infrastructure is that younger generations are becoming more vocal about their dissatisfaction with the physical quality of the urban environment. The coexistence of entrepreneurial innovation and demands for better public services indicates the continuing significance of territorial stigmatization (Wacquant, 2008) but also demonstrates Soja (2000) notion of Thirdspace, where local social practice interacts with global economic flows. Thus, Juliaca appears as an urban space not of confrontation between tradition and modernity but of their continuous articulation.

In general, the findings lend support to the concept of informal modernity advanced in this study. Informality should not be seen as a stage preceding the formal development of the city, but as a dynamic institutional configuration capable of integrating technological innovation, global commercial networks, and professional knowledge without losing the collective organizational principles derived from Andean reciprocity. The main theoretical contribution of the research consists in showing that intermediary cities of the Global South are capable of producing unique urban modernization trajectories in which informality functions as a constant infrastructure of governance, economic coordination, and socio-spatial production, rather than as a condition of marginality.

The findings are contrary to traditional linear theories of urban migrant assimilation. In Juliaca, second-generation merchants (Group C) do not follow a linear path toward Western salaried formality as they enter higher or technical education. Instead, the evidence suggests the emergence of a kind of “enlightened informality” or “technification.” Young professionals use their knowledge of accounting, engineering, and marketing to improve the logistical and commercial operations of the informal family business (Kanai & Schindler, 2022) while maintaining their union loyalty as a survival and resistance strategy against a state perceived as an “enemy” (Ziccardi & Dammert, 2021). But these young people have an aesthetic break with the founding generation: their rejection of dirty streets and the absence of sidewalks (Wacquant, 2008) is a demand for physical modernization that paradoxically coexists with technological sophistication and the continued reproduction of a territory that permanently defies state governance.

6. CONCLUSIONS

This paper demonstrates that the social production of the urban space of Juliaca is primarily shaped by internal migration, networks of Andean reciprocity, and grassroots organizations that mediate access to commercial spaces, coordinate economic activities, and sustain everyday urban governance. Instead of operating outside the institutional order, these community arrangements produce durable governance structures where state institutions and local organizations co-exist, negotiating territorial regulation. The results also show Andean reciprocity as a strategic resource for migrant incorporation and urban resilience, and that second-generation traders fuse digital technologies and professional knowledge with traditional modes of collective organization, thus producing an informal modernity.

This research contributes to debates on the social production of space, informal governance, and Southern urbanism by demonstrating that informality is not a condition of marginality or institutional failure. Reciprocity networks, kinship relations, and trade unions, on the other hand, offer stable socio-spatial infrastructures for the continuity of economic coordination and collective action. These findings confound linear models of formalization and modernization, showing that traditional institutions can coexist with technological innovation and global commercial integration. The findings are important for city planning and public policy. “Urban planners should embrace participatory approaches that acknowledge grassroots organizations and trade unions as legitimate stakeholders in planning land management, commercial zoning, and infrastructure. Likewise, state institutions should institutionalize collaborative governance by creating permanent mechanisms for dialogue with community organizations rather than relying on regulatory or enforcement interventions. Policies on formalization should also go beyond an exclusive focus on legal registration and individual property rights and consider locally legitimate governance arrangements and collective organizational practices in policy design.

We should note some methodological limitations. The results derive from a qualitative single-case study and allow only analytical, rather than statistical, generalizations. The purposive sampling strategy may have introduced selection bias because it focused on well-established organizational actors, while the non-probabilistic nature of the sample limits the transferability of the findings to other urban contexts. The conclusions should thus be understood as context-bound insights into the governance dynamics of Juliaca, rather than as universal patterns. Future research should pursue this line of inquiry by carrying out comparative studies of other intermediary Andean cities to test the wider applicability of these findings. Larger populations could be studied through quantitative and mixed-methods research to determine the relative influence and prevalence of reciprocity networks and informal governance. Studies investigating the role of gender in these organizational networks, as well as longitudinal studies tracking their evolution over time, would provide important evidence on how grassroots governance adapts to technological change, economic transformation, and changing state policies in intermediary cities of the Global South. This research adds to the scholarship on urban informality and socio-spatial production, but also contributes to scholarship on public policy and public administration by demonstrating that grassroots governance institutions are not transitional alternatives to weak state capacity, but rather persistent elements of urban governance. These results indicate that urban policies in intermediary cities should be developed through collaborative, place-based governance approaches that involve community organizations in planning, service delivery, conflict mediation, and territorial management. This approach can enhance the legitimacy of policies, the effectiveness of institutions, and the long-term sustainability of urban development in rapidly urbanizing regions of the Global South.

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