

Chapter 18

Urban Ethnobotany: Theoretical and Methodological Contributions

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Abstract

Urban Ethnobotany studies, among other issues, the botanical knowledge characteristic of those pluricultural contexts that are the urban agglomerations. The botanical knowledge and beliefs guide the strategies of selection and consumption of plants, parts thereof, and plant products. The development of a research in the conurbation Buenos Aires-La Plata (Argentina) enables the characterization of the urban botanical knowledge as a dynamic and complex corpus which includes nontraditional elements and others linked to local family traditions as well as to traditions concerning different groups of immigrants. From this starting point, this chapter includes some theoretical reflections and innovative methodological tools to understand the composition and dynamic of urban botanical knowledge, based on the evaluation of the diversity of plant elements present in the studied area and their circulation. This is performed both in the restricted context of immigrant groups (Bolivian, Chinese) and the general commercial circuit.

Key words Urban ethnobotany, Botanical knowledge, Theoretical framework, Methodological tools, Conurbation Buenos Aires-La Plata, Argentina, Immigrants

1 Introduction

This chapter includes some theoretical and methodological contributions emerging from different studies in Urban Ethnobotany, carried out at the Laboratorio de Etnobotánica y Botánica Aplicada (LEBA), Facultad de Ciencias Naturales y Museo (FCNyM), Universidad Nacional de La Plata (UNLP), Argentina. The approach focuses on the study of botanical knowledge in urban areas, which guides the selection of different vegetal elements such as plants, parts thereof, and products derived from them. The study area corresponds to the Buenos Aires-La Plata conurbation, the largest metropolitan area in Argentina both in population and size. It comprises two contiguous urban agglomerations that emerged around the cities of Buenos Aires, capital of the country, and La Plata, capital of the Province of Buenos Aires.

In a broad sense, the Ethnobotany studies the complex relationships between people and plants [1–3]. Within this framework, Urban Ethnobotany is a particular chapter of recent development [4–7]. Among other issues, Urban Ethnobotany deals with the study of the peculiar characteristics of urban botanical knowledge (UBK) [8, 9]. During the course of different research in the study area, the need to consider the theoretical framework became evident, in particular to deal with the intrinsic complexity of the botanical knowledge, as well as with its particular composition and dynamic in a pluricultural context. Novel methodological tools emerged as a result of this reflection. Then, the aim of these pages is to present those contributions and to promote studies in Urban Ethnobotany from different perspectives, in order to expand their theoretical and methodological basis.

1.1 Urban Botanical Knowledge

In general terms, the botanical knowledge (BK) is a set of knowledge and beliefs that people have about the vegetal elements of their environment. The BK emerges from the relationships between people and plants, guides their criteria of selecting, and uses those resources, as well as their strategies of obtaining and processing plants, and their consumption patterns. This definition includes either the BK of the traditional societies such as the nontraditional societies. For those called *traditional societies* there are many contributions related to various aspects of the expressions of BK, as ethnoclassifications [10, 11], traditional medicinal uses that are relevant for the search of new active chemical principles [12, 13], or the rescue of traditional knowledge related to the conservation of resources, especially in areas affected by processes of environmental and cultural changes [14–18].

In the last decades, studies on the traditional BK (TBK) have proliferated because it is often close to extinction and therefore its recovery is urgent [19–22]. In contrast, studies on BK in nontraditional societies have been less frequent. The nontraditional BK is associated with Western scientific knowledge—beyond the diverse connotations of the term *Western* [23]—and it is also linked to the diffusion of that knowledge through different mass media [24], and the contents of education programs [25].

Some authors have used the expression *ethnobotanical knowledge* to refer exclusively to TBK [26–28], but Ethnobotany is a scientific discipline and, therefore, *ethnobotanical knowledge* can be referred to the scientific knowledge it produces (i.e., nontraditional), and not to TBK. This discussion arises from the meaning given to prefix *ethno-*, often referred to the knowledge system of a given culture [29]. To avoid confusion, it is preferable to talk about TBK for the heritage of traditional societies and to limit the use of the expression *ethnobotanical knowledge* to the one produced by Ethnobotany. Of course, this decision does not prevent the possibility of dialogue between the TBK and the scientific BK [3, 30, 31].

Table 1
Differences between traditional and nontraditional botanical knowledge

| Traditional botanical knowledge | Nontraditional botanical knowledge |
|---|---|
| Knowledge belongs to culturally homogeneous contexts | Knowledge belongs to culturally heterogeneous contexts (pluricultural) |
| It is the result of long experience of the human group in its environment | It is not the result of long experience of the human group in its environment (variable residence time) |
| It is transmitted from generation to generation, orally and in shared practices | It is transmitted through different mass media |
| The relationship between production and consumption is <i>direct</i> (those who consume, produce) | The relationship between production and consumption is <i>indirect</i> (those who consume, not produce) |
| Production practices are known and linked to the conservation of plant resources | Production practices are little known or unknown, not linked to the conservation of plant resources |

The concept of TBK is linked to that of *traditional ecological knowledge* (TEK), which is a contribution to the conservation of biocultural diversity, from an integrative perspective [20, 32–36]. The term *traditional* is not free of debate [23], however, it is usually assumed that the TBK regards to culturally homogeneous contexts, with a long experience of the human group in its environment, where knowledge and beliefs transmitted from generation to generation, orally and in shared practices. In traditional societies, the people *who consume, produce*, therefore, the relationship between production and consumption is a direct link. Also, the TBK is *adaptive*, because it allows different adjustments of the human group to changes in their surroundings, consequently TBK is neither conservative nor static but dynamic and innovative, that is, it evolves [9, 19, 37]. In contrast, the BK in large urban areas was considered nontraditional, as opposed to traditional knowledge: it is characteristic of pluricultural contexts, without a long experience of the human group in its environment, and is transmitted through the mass media. The link between production and consumption is indirect: *those who consume do not produce*. Therefore, the majority of the urban population knows little about the properties of the vegetal elements; less about their components or their origin, and the ways of obtaining and processing them are even lesser known [38]. However, this nontraditional BK is also *adaptive*, because it mediates between consumers and the supply of products of vegetal origin, guiding the choice of any of them, while others are discarded [8, 9, 39, 40]. Table 1 summarizes the main differences between TBK and nontraditional BK.

It is a common tendency to think that in urban areas nontraditional BK predominates. However, a conurbation is a

pluricultural context, so its BK is heterogeneous. This is due in great part to the presence of immigrant groups of different origin and residence time, cohabiting with the local inhabitants. From the study of the BK of immigrant groups in urban areas different studies from the urban Ethnobotanical approach have been developed in many countries [5, 41–50]. In Argentina urban ethnobotanical studies on immigrants BK have also been conducted [8, 9, 51], as well as on nontraditional urban BK [39, 40, 52–60].

The segments of immigrants in metropolitan areas retain a BK relative to their areas of origin. Strictly speaking, it is not a TBK, but we consider that it is *linked to traditions* and recreated in a new cultural context. In urban areas there also coexist BK linked to other traditions, such as those for the internal migrants coming from other urban and rural areas, and those related to family traditions, such as those associated with culinary knowledge and home therapeutic practices [61–64].

From the previous statement it is concluded that there is the need to assume the complexity of BK in urban agglomerations, so as not to identify it only with the nontraditional BK. Thus, we propose to conceptualize the UBK as a complex, dynamic, and adaptive *corpus*, consisting of different types of knowledge and beliefs that guide selective actions on the use of plants, their parts, and products deriving from them. Thereby, UBK includes nontraditional components and others linked to traditions (family traditions, traditions of the origin areas in the case of immigrant groups), which coexist and interact in the same pluricultural context.

For the understanding of UBK it is important to evaluate not only its composition but also its dynamic that expressed in the movement of vegetal elements and their uses inside the pluricultural context. Many of these elements are within the general commercial circuit, and their characteristics, uses, and properties are disseminated through the mass media. For most urban inhabitants these elements are well known or *visible*. In contrast, other vegetal elements are restricted to the scope of the segments of immigrants, or family traditions, and are unknown or *invisible* to the rest of the population. For example, pears, apples, oranges, bananas, and many other fruits are common in every supermarket (*visible*), but *Syzygium samarangense* (Blume) Merr. & L.M. Perry (Myrtaceae), “Java apple,” “pu tao yang” is a fruit that is sold only in certain shops in the Chinese community in Buenos Aires city, then, it is *invisible*. The distinction visible/invisible is not a definitive or invariable categorization: there are several cases between the extremes, as *Pyrus pyrifolia* (Burm. f.) Nakai (Rosaceae), “li shan,” fruit sold in the Chinese shops and sometimes in stores of the general commercial circuit [57].

Mobility in the circulation of vegetal elements expresses the dynamic of the UBK: some of them become visible when entering the general commercial circuit. Thus, the knowledge associated

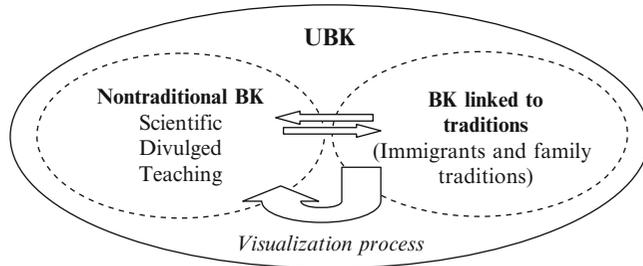


Fig. 1 UBK composition (nontraditional BK and BK linked to traditions, interacting) and UBK dynamic (visualization process)

with traditions, limited to immigrant groups, expands and becomes generalized. In this *visualization process* (Fig. 1), the mass media play a significant role to disseminate and promote the use of circulating plant elements. In this context, the example of *Pyrus pyrifolia* shows that knowledge of this species is in an expansion process (*visualization*). *Actinidia chinensis* Planch. var. *deliciosa* (A. Chev.) A. Chev (Actinidiaceae), “Kiwi,” on the other hand, is already visible: it was almost unknown a few decades ago, but today their presence is common in greengrocers and supermarkets.

1.2 Study Area and Actors Involved

1.2.1 Buenos Aires-La Plata Conurbation

An *urban agglomeration* is an urbanized region extended continuously through different administrative districts, which includes a central city and various adjacent urbanizations that will be absorbed from their own growing rate. However, a *conurbation* does not emerge around a city, but that brings together different urban nuclei initially separated but contiguous. Conurbations do not require the continuity of the urbanized space: the central cities are connected by paths, roads, highways, railways that cross not urban areas and make it possible the permanent transfer of people and products.

The study area is the conurbation Buenos Aires-La Plata, including the Greater Buenos Aires, an urban agglomeration including Buenos Aires city (Federal District) and the Greater La Plata, the adjacent agglomeration comprising La Plata city (Fig. 2). Greater Buenos Aires is composed of the Federal District and 24 districts from the Province of Buenos Aires. Its total area is 3,833 km². Sometimes other six districts are considered as partially integrating the agglomeration [65, 66]. Buenos Aires city, with 202 km², has a population of 2,891,082 inhabitants, while in the 24 districts of Province of Buenos Aires overall amount is of 9,910,282 inhabitants [67]. In population, Greater Buenos Aires is the largest agglomeration in Argentina, the second in South America (after the metropolitan area of São Paulo, Brazil), the third in Latin America (after São Paulo and Mexico D.F.), the fifth of America, and the seventeenth worldwide [68]. The Greater La Plata is constituted by three districts of the Province of Buenos



Fig. 2 Satellite image corresponding to the Río de la Plata region (NASA, April 2007), where noted the location of Greater Buenos Aires and Greater La Plata, which form a large conurbation

Aires: La Plata, Berisso, and Ensenada, its total surface is of 1,162 km², and its population of 793,365 inhabitants [67].

Buenos Aires-La Plata conurbation is heterogeneous, and comprises three types of spaces: (a) urbanized areas themselves, (b) nonurbanized areas with native vegetation (some of which correspond to natural protected areas), (c) *periurban areas* or transition zones between urban and nonurbanized areas (including rural zones). These latter are characterized by moving boundaries, which fluctuate according to the rhythms of urbanization [69].

In periurban sectors various horticultural undertakings are located, which are known all together as *green belt* or *horticultural belt*. It supplies fresh vegetables and fresh fruits to the urban sectors themselves and also to other provinces. The horticultural belt includes some 1,270 farms, in 8,160 ha, according to the 1998 Horticultural Census [70–72]. Local horticulture includes business ventures (which generally occupy large areas) and also different homegardens, that are low surface areas, near houses, where vegetables and fruit trees are cultivated, and that provide raw material for handmade vegetal products that are elaborated for family consumption and also for occasional sale on a reduced scale as a supplement to the domestic economy [64, 73]. Likewise, outside

the horticultural belt, there are homegardens and vineyards in periurban areas, located next to native vegetation areas in the coasts of the Río de la Plata [37, 74–76].

1.2.2 *Recent Immigration in the Conurbation*

Argentina has received massive waves of immigration from the mid-nineteenth century and first half of the twentieth century. Most of these immigrants were of European origin: 44.9 % Italian and 31.5 % Spaniards on the total number of immigrants registered until 1940. These migration flows have helped to shape the country's cultural heritage, and many current "family traditions" have their roots in that early immigration. The waves of immigration from neighboring countries have been more or less constant in that period, but with greater presence in the borderline provinces.

In the second half of the twentieth century, a new kind of recent immigration occurred, not massive, especially from neighboring countries, whose destiny focused in Buenos Aires metropolitan area. These immigrants were oriented towards horticultural activity in periurban areas, as well as towards manufacturing industry, construction, and commerce in strictly urban areas. Most neighboring immigration comes from Paraguay and Bolivia (21.22 % and 15.24 %, respectively, of all foreigners in 2001).

The preference for the metropolitan area is expressed in some numbers: Bolivian immigrants living in Jujuy and Salta provinces represented 22 % of the total ones in the country in 2001, whereas those living in Buenos Aires city and the Province of Buenos Aires, together, accounted for 60 %. In Buenos Aires city, the total of immigrants from Bolivia, Paraguay, and Peru represented about 5 % of the total local population; for all the country, just under 2 % [77–80]. In the horticultural belt of Florencio Varela, Berazategui, and La Plata districts, 39.2 % of producers have of Bolivian origin in 2001: 75 % as renters and 25 % of owners who used only work force proceeding from Bolivia [64, 70, 81, 82].

Bolivian immigrants are an example of the pattern that connects the periurban areas (production) with the strictly urban areas (consumption). Immigrants dedicated to horticultural production provide food for the urban sector, where other Bolivian immigrants commercialize those products: e.g., at Bolivian traditional market of neighborhood of Liniers, placed in the west of the Buenos Aires city [9, 83, 84].

Another recent immigration in the conurbation corresponds to Far Eastern countries such as China, Korea, and Japan. Asian immigration in 2001 represented almost 2 % of all foreigners in the country, meager value compared to 67.96 % coming from American countries and 28.22 % from European countries [77]. However, immigrants concentrated in Buenos Aires city have a conspicuous presence and are engaged in the manufacture of clothing and commerce (in the categories of clothing and food). Chinese immigration in the first half of the twentieth century was low and settled

in periurban areas, dedicated to horticultural practices. In the late twentieth century, Chinese immigrants exceeded in number of the Japanese and Koreans, who previously dominated [85–88].

At present, the Chinese community in Buenos Aires city has several restaurants, shops, and supermarkets concentrated in one area of the neighborhood of Belgrano, called *Chinatown*. Supermarkets offer products that satisfy the demands of the community itself, other communities (Japanese, Korean, Arabic), and local residents looking for new products. In many establishments the Chinese owners give employment to Bolivian immigrants. It is estimated that Chinatown receives some 15,000 visitors every weekend. For the Chinese community it embodies a space for local tourism: restaurants offering Chinese food oriented to the “Argentine taste.” Restaurants that offer dishes preferred by Chinese immigrants, however, are not located in Chinatown. Nevertheless, its markets introduce a wide variety of novel plant products and are a center for disseminating those products to the local urban residents [89].

2 Methodological Inputs

2.1 General Considerations

The studies on the UBK *composition* were oriented to evaluate the components linked to traditions in two reference groups of immigrants: the Bolivians (at traditional market of Liniers neighborhood), and the Chinese (at supermarkets in Chinatown of Belgrano neighborhood). For their traditions of origin, they represent centers of conservation of knowledge and beliefs about plants and their uses. Thus, the UBK linked to its traditions can be extrapolated from the analysis of the vegetal products in circulation. To assess the UBK *dynamic*, the vegetal elements restricted to the groups of immigrants were analyzed that are in process of visualization. For this, the routes of entering the general commercial circuit were inquired.

For Bolivian immigrants segment, the traditional market of Liniers, like other traditional markets, is considered as a dynamic system whose components (actors and social networks, exchange and distribution of products, their origin and destination), beyond the geographical and anthropological approaches, need to be explored from an ethnobotanical perspective [90]. Latin American traditional markets are valuable sources of information for the study of the BK and also germplasm banks that help to preserve plant diversity, through the use of different species [91–98]. However, in Argentina there are not many precedents about researches in traditional markets placed in a strictly urban area as the one here studied. In that sense, this work is a contribution from Urban Ethnobotany. In contrast, Chinatown is not a traditional market, because of the generalist commercial feature of their

premises, although they also sell products linked to their own traditions.

The ethnobotanical data collection followed the usual qualitative techniques and methods [99–102], such as participant observation, free listings, open-ended, and semi-structured interviews, focused according to specific criteria for traditional markets [90]. In all the cases samples of plants and their products were collected, which were deposited in the LEBA. The available literature relevant to the observed species and their uses was revised. The information from labels, leaflets, and advertisements of many products, both printed and available in electronic media, was evaluated because this information guides the general public in the selection of products to be consumed.

Salesmen have been considered as *qualified informants*, people of both sexes and different ages that demonstrate their knowledge about the properties of the vegetal products they sell. In Chinatown, the study is still under development in three major supermarkets, with 10 qualified informants interviewed. In traditional market of Liniers, 30 outlets (street stalls and premises) have been relieved, and 50 informants have been interviewed (from a total of 95 salesmen).

2.2 Contributions to the Study of the UBK Composition

Plants, parts thereof, and products of plant origin circulating within the restricted scope of the immigrant groups provide information about the UBK linked to their traditions of origin. The work focused on those vegetal elements that are marketed both for food and therapeutic purposes. This decision is based on the fact that these elements are the core of attention of both the Bolivian traditional market of Liniers and Chinatown of Belgrano, but also it has been assumed that the boundary line between these categories is not always clear and precise and many plants *serve to eat* while they *are used to heal* [62, 103, 104]. This argument is in line with the broad concept of health as a state of complete physical, mental, and social welfare, not just the absence of disease [105]. Among immigrants, the integrative notion of *plants to eat and heal* is related to their own traditions. For the rest of the inhabitants of the conurbation, that notion is mediated by the communication systems that help to spread the idea of *healthy foods*.

The analysis of the plant elements useful to eat and heal at Liniers Bolivian market shows that from a total of 160 recorded plant species that are sold as food, 54 are valued as food plants and at the same time as medicinal plants. Of these, vegetal products for 20 species are marketed that are found only in this market, that is, they are *exclusive* elements (Table 2). It is noteworthy that exclusivity refers to products and not to species. For example, for *Phaseolus vulgaris*, cultivars called “panamito” and “canario” are exclusive to Liniers market, but other cultivars of beans are sold as well (“alubia,” “colorado,” “negro,” “regina,” among others),

Table 2

Parts of plants and plant products belonging to 20 species from ten botanical families, exclusively commercialized in the Bolivian market of Liniers, Buenos Aires city

| Families | Scientific names | Locales names | Part/products |
|---------------|--|--|---|
| Asteraceae | <i>Porophyllum ruderale</i> (Jacq.) Cass. | Quirquina | Fresh aerial parts |
| | <i>Smallanthus sonchifolius</i> (Poepp. & Endl.) H.Rob. | Yacón | Fresh roots and jam |
| | <i>Tagetes minuta</i> L. | Huacatay | Fresh aerial parts |
| Basellaceae | <i>Ullucus tuberosus</i> Caldas | Ulluco/papa lisa | Fresh tubers |
| Brassicaceae | <i>Lepidium meyenii</i> Walp. | Maca | Roots in powder or as flour |
| Cucurbitaceae | <i>Cucurbita ficifolia</i> Bouché | Cayote/alcayota | Fresh fruits |
| | <i>Cyclanthera pedata</i> (L.) Schrader | Caiwa/achojcha | Fresh fruits |
| | <i>Sechium edule</i> (Jacq.) Sw | Papa del aire/chayote | Fresh fruits |
| Euphorbiaceae | <i>Plukenetia volubilis</i> L. | Sacha inchi | Seeds in snacks, liquid, ointment, and powder |
| Leguminosae | <i>Arachis hypogaea</i> L. cvs. | Maní boliviano | Dry seeds |
| | <i>Lablab purpureus</i> (L.) Sweet | Poroto japonés | Fresh fruits |
| | <i>Lupinus mutabilis</i> Sweet | Tauri/tarwi | Dry seeds |
| | <i>Pachyrhizus ahipa</i> (Wedd.) Parodi | Ajipa | Fresh roots |
| | <i>Phaseolus vulgaris</i> L. cvs. | Porotos <i>canario</i> y <i>panamito</i> | Dry seeds |
| Oxalidaceae | <i>Oxalis tuberosa</i> Molina | Oca | Fresh tubers |
| Poaceae | <i>Zea mays</i> L. cvs. | Maíz <i>morado</i> | Whole dry spikes or powder |
| | | Maíz <i>pelado</i> o <i>mote</i> | Dry or cooked grains |
| | | Maíces <i>blanco, colorado, chuspillo</i> y <i>huillcaparu</i> | Dry or cooked grains Dry grains |
| Rubiaceae | <i>Coffea arabica</i> L. | Sultana | Seeds (seed coat) |
| Solanaceae | <i>Capsicum annuum</i> L. cvs. | Ajés <i>picante, escabeche, amarillo</i> y <i>campanita</i> | Fresh and dry fruits |
| | <i>Capsicum pubescens</i> Ruiz & Pav. | Locoto/rocoto | Fresh fruits and powder |
| | <i>Solanum tuberosum</i> L. cvs. | <i>Chuño</i> y papines | Dried and fresh tubers |

which are also usually expended in the general commercial circuit shops. These plant elements, as opposed to exclusive, have been named *generalized* [8].

The same situation occurs with cultivars of *Capsicum annuum* and *Zea mays* cited as exclusive, while other products (peppers, corn) are generalized. The cultivar of *Arachis hypogaea* called

“maní boliviano” (“Bolivian peanut”) is exclusive of the Liniers Bolivian market, while others peanuts are widespread. The fresh fruits of *Cucurbita ficifolia* are also exclusive, but alcayota jam is sold in several supermarkets (generalized). These cases express that one species can be represented by exclusive and generalized elements in the same area of study, even in the same market [8, 9].

The distinction *exclusive/generalized* is a methodological tool, because that categorization of plant elements enables to express the underlying BK: generalized elements are *visible* to the population and linked to nontraditional component of the UBK, the exclusive ones are *invisible* and refers to the component linked to traditions. Regarding Liniers Bolivian market, the species listed in Table 2 correspond to Andean crops, excluding the cases of *Sechium edule*, of Mesoamerican origin, and *Lablab purpureus* and *Coffea arabica*, both from Africa; however, they are plants and products commonly used in Andean countries. Bolivian immigrants enter their Andean elements that satisfy the demands of their own community and also open up possibilities for local inhabitants to increase urban plant diversity with plants with therapeutic and alimentary value, such as *Lupinus mutabilis*, relevant source of protein, and some microthermic tubers with antioxidant properties [106–108]. In addition, biocultural diversity is incremented with the incorporation of knowledge and beliefs linked to traditions in the local UBK domain.

2.3 Contributions to the Study of the UBK Dynamics

The study of the UBK dynamics involves a look on the movement of vegetal elements, especially the passage of such elements from a restricted context (such as immigrants segments) into the broader general commercial circuit. From the distinction *exclusive/generalized* or, if it is preferred, *invisible/visible*, it is possible to identify many different plant elements located between the extreme cases, more or less common in immigrant outlets and also in the general commercial circuit, therefore, with varying degrees of *visualization*. In evaluating the visualization process it has been particularly useful to consider the vegetal elements that serve to eat and heal. In the metropolitan area of Buenos Aires, as elsewhere in the world, the general commercial circuit shops called *dietéticas* or *health-food stores* [109] are the focus that concentrates the interest on plants that contribute to health, and are privileged sites chosen by the people for the supply of healthy foods, dietary supplements, and materials for infusions—in general for therapeutic purposes. Urban residents value these shops as a place where they can obtain safe products, and in the discourse of sellers and consumers there are no defined limits in its dual character of food sale and therapeutic elements dispensing [9, 39].

Decades ago, the sale of plant material for medicinal purposes was the patrimony of *herbal shops* or *herboristerías*, but at present, these places are almost gone, and herbal products are sold routinely in the health-food stores or *dietéticas* [58, 109].

These shops are furthermore true dispersal centers for plant products, enhanced by the mass media. It has been confirmed in the health-food stores the presence of different products coming from the restricted contexts of immigrant groups, both the Bolivian and Chinese ones. Once in the health-food stores, those invisible products gain the general commercial circuit and become visible. In this sense, those stores are *visualization agents*. As a contribution to the study of the UBK dynamics, the exploration of these shops is an adequate methodological tool.

Table 2 includes two species whose products are exclusive in Liniers Bolivian market, *Lepidium meyenii*, “maca” and *Plukenetia volubilis*, “sacha inchi.” Both of them originate from Peru, where their properties are known from pre-hispanic times [54] and enter directly to Buenos Aires from Bolivia. Recently, health-food stores expend other products of these species (usually tablets); therefore, they are immersed in the visualization process. This is amplified by the diffusion of its therapeutic properties, especially on the Internet. A similar case, even more widespread, is *Morinda citrifolia* L. (Rubiaceae), “noni,” a Polynesian plant, which is sold in health-food stores, in powder or liquid; sometimes it is sold in the Liniers Bolivian market as well, where it enters from Peru through Bolivia. In a short time this species has become popular worldwide due to the wide spectrum of therapeutic effects that are attributed to it [54, 110]. Another example, but in this case related to the segment of Chinese immigrants, is *Lycium barbarum* L. (Solanaceae), “goji,” whose dry fruits are sold for its therapeutic effects at Chinatown, in Belgrano neighborhood [57]; it is now sold in certain health-food stores, so its visualization is recent in Argentina (in other countries has already achieved wide diffusion).

3 Final Remarks

Relationships between people and plants are intrinsically complex and Ethnobotany must reflect this complexity. In the same sense, Urban Ethnobotany must reflect the complexity of the UBK, in order to understand how this knowledge is embodied in specific human actions such as strategies of selection and consumption of plant origin products.

As a result of researches on UBK complexity in vogue in the pluricultural context of a conurbation, there are two methodological tools considered relevant for the comprehension of the UBK composition and dynamic. Its relevance lies in assuming the complexity of the phenomena and that our explanation result consequent.

Thereby, this contribution gives a theoretical reflection and some methodological inputs to Urban Ethnobotany, a recently installed field, especially in Argentina, that becomes a fertile ground to develop new perspectives.

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