The urban system, centralities and the use of urban space in middle cities[1]

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Abstract

The text is structured in three parts. In the first, we present a discussion about the concept of center (downtown) and its role for the retail trade. The center is understood as a place of confluence (as a dialectical and hierarchical pair in relation to the periphery) resulting from the search by the economic agents for the best locations for commercial establishments, making use of the land in the city. Next, we discuss the formation of subcenters defining new centralities in medium-sized cities to show how the city restructures in response to changes at different scales, from the broader process of globalization to the localization of commercial activities, in a geographic articulation of scales. The redefinition in the location of commercial activities in areas other than the city center allows the formation of new centers and, consequently, the projection of their roles as new centralities. Finally, the displacement of people in their consumption actions shows how mobility presents itself in urban space. Urban mobility is here explained from the choices and preferences of consumers in their search for the place of purchases articulating what we call centrality to their individual economic profile. We present, in the end, some partial conclusions of a collective research carried out in several medium-sized cities in the State of São Paulo. We have chosen, as case studies, the cities of Presidente Prudente, Ribeirão Preto and Marília, each one with their specific characteristics that condition and are the product of the new relations of people in their choices of consumption. As it deals with a collective work, some descriptions and conclusions are analyzed and explained in function of the spatial, temporal and thematic clipping presented. Although the definition of average city is taken from the position of the city in the urban network, in this study we will privilege the city in its specific restructuring, that is, in the reconfiguration of its urban design.

As partial result, we will demonstrate the following: 1) consumption is conditioned by the social class to which the individual belongs; 2) urban mobility (independent of means of transport) shapes the new centralities and modifies the role of the main center of the city; 3) the city restructures because of the locations that differ according to people's purchasing power.

From the methodological viewpoint, the information was obtained indirectly and directly through field observation, questionnaires and interviews with different groups of people. As a way of visualizing the relationship between the dimensions of the city center and the location of retail activities, the conformation of new centralities and how consumers are distributed according to their specific characteristics, we use cartographic representation.

1. Introduction

In this paper we shall present a number of partial conclusions from collective research made on middle cities from the state of São Paulo. This article uses as case studies, the cities of Presidente Prudente, Marília and Ribeirão Preto. These were the objects of study of a project titled: *Contemporary economic logics and social practices: middle cities and consumption.* This collective project was developed between 2012 and 2017 within the GAsPERR scope, as a collective labor process. Hence, a number of descriptions and conclusions are hereforth analyzed and explained according to their spatial, temporal and thematic sample size, which provided the basis for this research.

The text is structured under three levels. On the first, the article presents a discussion about 1) the Brazilian urban system, the concept of city center (downtown) and its role for the retail trade. The center is understood as being a place of confluence (as a dialectical and hierarchical pair in relation to the periphery) resulting from the search by economic agents for the best locations for commercial establishments, making use of the land in the city. It composes a dynamic and complex socio-spatial system. Second, the context of middle cities, with a focus on the state of São Paulo. Finally, the displacement of people in their consumption actions shows how mobility presents itself in urban space. Urban mobility is here explained from the choices and preferences of consumers in their search for a place for purchases, thus articulating what we call centrality to their individual economic profile. Finally, we highlight three middle-sized cities, as seen from the perspective of the location of retail activities and the mobility of consumers, as well as the concept of the city center (downtown) and its role for the retail trade. The center is seen as a place of confluence (as a dialectical and hierarchical pair in relation to the periphery) resulting from the search by the economic agents for the best locations for commercial establishments, making use of the land in the city. The center has a relevant role of articulating varied socio-economical-technical functions within na urban system.

In the end we present a few partial conclusions

of a collective research carried out in several middle cities in the State of São Paulo. The chosen case studies are, the cities of Presidente Prudente, Marília and Ribeirão Preto, each one with its specific characteristics, and conditions result of the new relations of people in their choices of living and consumption.

As partial results, in an urban system transitions are mediated by socio-technical diversity and mobility as follows: 1) consumption is conditioned by the social class to which the individual belongs to; 2) urban mobility shapes the new centralities and modifies the role of the main center of the city; 3) the city is restructured because of the locations that differ according to people's purchasing power. Thus, center's dislocation is mediated by socio-technical changed related to consumption patterns.

From the methodological point of view, the information was obtained indirectly (data from sources such as IBGE and municipal governments) and directly through field observation, questionnaires and interviews with different types of people. As a way of visualizing the relationship between the dimensions of the city center and the location of retail activities, the conformation of new centralities and how consumers are distributed according to their specific characteristics, cartographic representation was primarily used. We discuss the formation of subcenters defining new centralities in medium-sized cities to show how the city restructures in response to changes at different scales, from the broader process of globalization to the localization of retail activities, in a geographic articulation of scales that allows for the maintenance of a larger urban-regional coupled system. The redefinition in the location of commercial activities in areas other than the city center allows for the formation of new centers and, consequently, the projection of their roles as new centralities.

2. First level: the Brazilian urban system and the role of middle cities

Despite the fact that the studied areas are composed of medium-sized cities from the state of São Paulo, we will however analyze the current state of the urban Brazilian system.

Back in 2015 Brazil measured 8.5 million km2 and housed 207,660,929 inhabitants, according to the estimates of the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics-IBGE. Moreover, the country boasted 5,570 municipalities, whose populations varied between 11,967,825 inhabitants (São Paulo, being the most populous municipality) down to 805 inhabitants (Borá, the least populous municipality), both found in the very same State.

Considering as reference the demographic situation, the recent evolution of the Brazilian demographic framework presented a decrease in the annual population growth rate. If between 1950 and 1960 the growth rate reached 2,99% per annum, this same rate dropped to 1,17% within the last census period (2000-2010). In a country with ongoing expansion of land occupation with human activities (Urban and Rural activities), this will only mean that, due to an increase in vegetational growth, stimuli towards internal migration in a general sense also dropped. Thus, the boom of emergence of new cities and municipalities fell and a tendency towards of decline is apparent for the coming years. These statements are surely related to the spatial organization of the Brazilian urban network.

Regarding the cities themselves and the urbanization process identified in the urban mesh, it is possible to state that it has extended itself beyond the areas of cities, thus provoking the rise of new forms and dynamics, such as the formation of numerous centralities and urban-rural fringes. Another labor land division came about from the changes in the urban-industrial conditions from the Ford period which extended itself throughout the country. From the changes in the accumulation regime (also known as flexible accumulation), urbanization patterns changed towards featuring spatial characteristics which are concentrated and extensive, centralizing and disperse. For Monte-Mór (2005, p. 437), these processes articulate "local and distant public actions within competition and cooperation processes that become more and more plural and complex, just as internally as among the urban centers and urbanized regions". Another associated feature of this process is the decrease in the rural population, especially in states with greater economic dynamism.

In the last three decades, the role performed by medium and small-sized cities in Brazil's urbanization scenario have become altered. There was de-facto change, for instance, in the situation of urban concentration and territorial extension of the contemporary urban Brazil. In general terms, the part of the urban network which follows Brazil's coast on an average distance of 500 km shows density, dynamism and more intense articulations than the more consolidated part of the urban network

known as the countryside and, less intensively, on the edges of the greater Amazonian region.

Therefore it may be stated that the heterogeneity of the Brazilian urban system is in fact extreme: large and small municipalities, municipalities with a high number of inhabitants and others containing less than a thousand, 27.2% losing residents in the early 21st century and, according to the IBGE, 40% growing at a rate considered below the national average, besides the constant border expansion towards the north of the nation, followed by a steady introduction of new municipalities. This disparity in the Brazilian urban system does have a historical basis: in a short time of over 500 years the colonial land occupation began at the coastline; an economy based on the cycles sustained by a product (gold, sugar cane, coffee) supported in the expansion of occupied land; this evolved until the 1930s in parallel to a lack of transport articulation amongst the various regions of the country; followed by an industrialization propelled by a process of import substitution, incomplete and localized in specific areas of the country, and rapid population growth, especially in state capitals, combined by the interiorization of inhabitants through the rise of medium sized cities, among other factors. Furthermore, there are several factors which supported the formation of the Brazilian urban system. Let us not overstate these factors to the point of exhaustion, but merely highlight a few in order to demonstrate how land was occupied over time, and how that has intensified in the last 50 years.

The structural changes in the economy may be attributed to uneven land occupation and their difference in population density, the manner under which the process of capital globalization brought about changes in the functions and forms of the urban system as well as the changes in territorial labor division. With that in mind, it is possible to affirm that there was a specialization of some spaces (industrial cities, the touristic coast, agrobusiness cities, etc.), through mutually influential actions of cities that generated a high level of functional complexity, thus conforming a system characterized by different types of urban centers which may be different, depending on the scale of approach (national or regional) as well as their particular historical development. This provides characteristics to geographical spaces according to their occupation as well as their regional and social resulting disparities. As per the larger urban system, cities may be classified by the concentration of their economic activities which generate inter-urban centralities (based on the REGIC [*Regions of Cities' Influences*] from IBGE) as well as the hierarchy related to this centrality or even that heterarchy (Catelan, 2013), defined by flows of capital and goods among cities from global, and not regional or national rationales, which may be studied in accordance with categories such as time, space and movement.

The importance of the study of middle cities is justified due to the redefinition of their roles in the territorial division of labor; the demographic importance of those cities; direct relations (resulting in urban hierarchy or heterarchy) with cities of other levels of importance (be they major or smaller cities) which reaffirm their own identities and fall theoretically or conceptually apart from a metropolis or smaller city bias.

In other words, since middle cities are less complex totalities than say, metropoles, they are worth to be studied, with an approach of broader high intensity context whilst respecting the existing articulations between the urban and the rural (as per the transformation of rural land into urban land, or from a regional scale, or even from its relations of urban heterarchy). That is why it is relevant to consider close and distant orders (i.e., the relations with closer cities or the impacts of globalization in the urban space). In this fashion, it is possible to articulate the scales in the composition of the urban system, observe what is new in the horizontal and cross-sectional relations between the cities themselves; amongst them in the urban system, and furthermore, the relations between cities from different urban systems (different socio-spatial formations), focusing on international scales. Finally, when the focus is on namely middle cities, one has to consider territorial continuities (structure of the polarization area of a middle city by means of population, merchandise and information displacement) as well as spatial continuities (structure of transport and communication axes and the building of fast circulation roads or the introduction of fiber optic networks).

For comparative purposes, an analysis of images 1, 2, and 3 is recommended. On the first image, the Brazilian urban system is presented according to the hierarchy system defined by the relations between cities resulting from different economic and social fluxes. The layout on image 2 presents the relation between hierarchy and heterarchy from the geographical scales and global rationales.

Image 1. The Brazilian hierarchical urban system (according to cities' regions of influence).
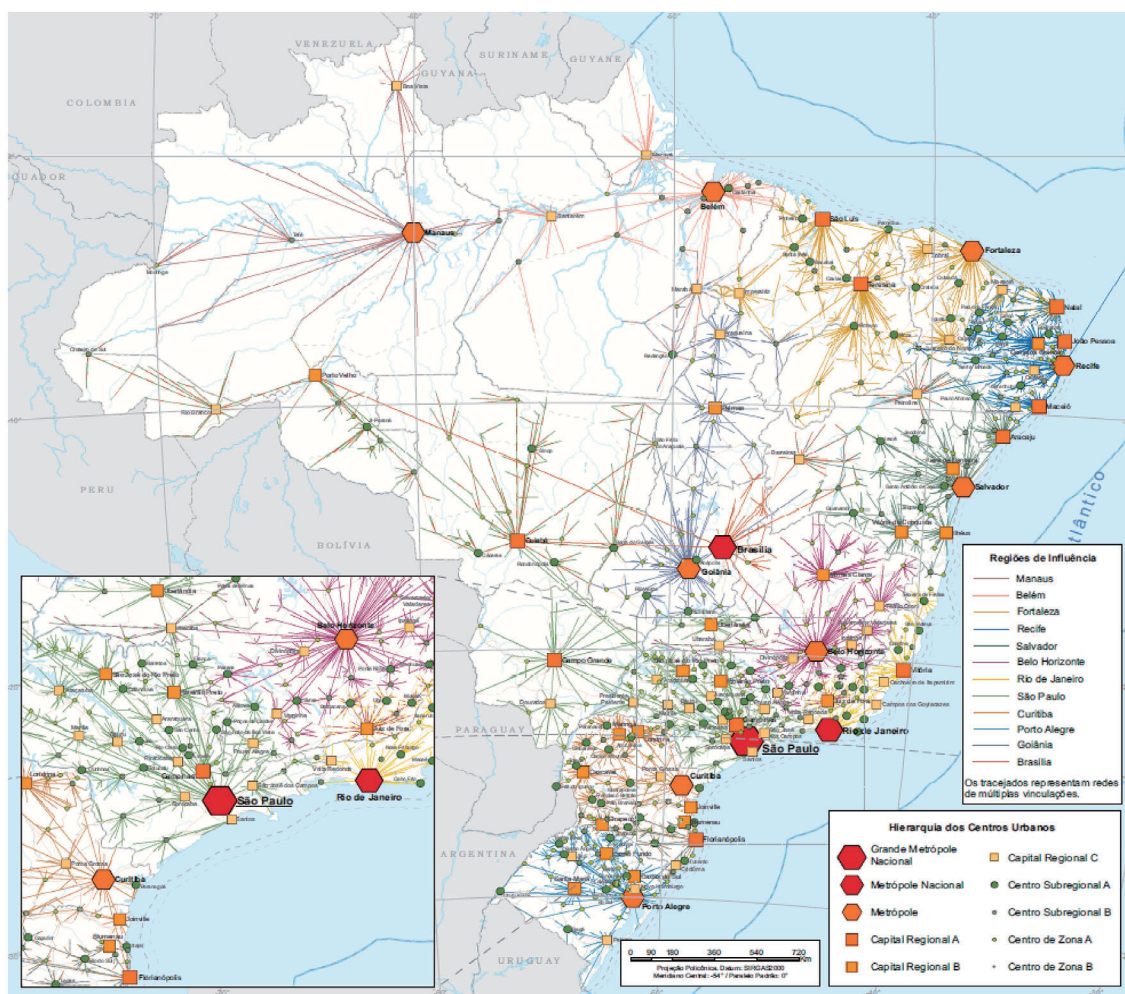
Source: IBGE/REGIC, 2010

Image 2: Theoretical and methodological frame for a combined reading of hierarchy and heterarchy.
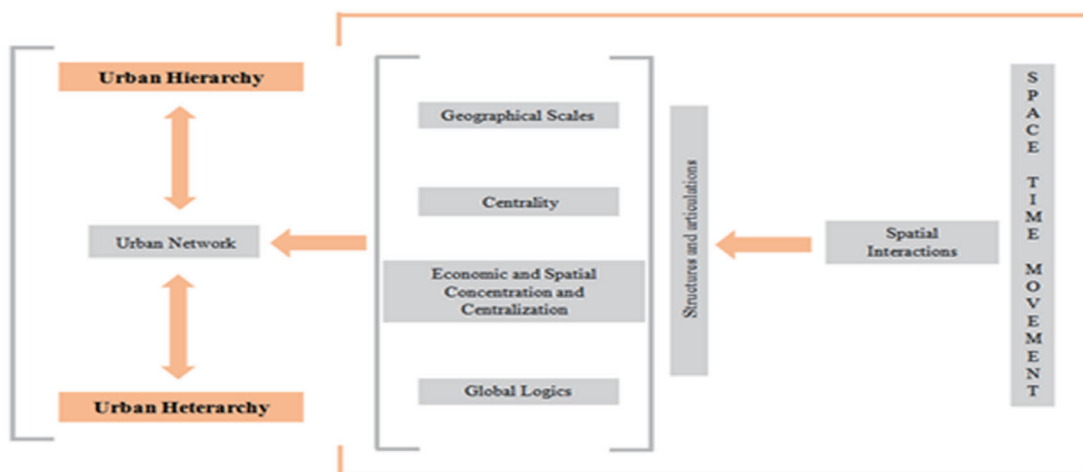
Source: Catelan, 2013.

3. Second level: the city and social differentiation as a starting point

In the terms proposed by this study, the network and urban system reference utilized is that which can be called of a middle city. To begin, let us make clear what we mean by middle city.

Our focus in this paper may particularly be summarized by the expression *social differentiation*. For Ascher (2000), "social differentiation touches down on all spheres of social life" (p. 54-55) and

this observation does not narrow down to any specific period, but rather infers differentiation as an inherent part of the social dynamics in a city. For this author, this also means that "globalization, when associated to different local societies under a same productive process adds to social differentiation a sort of territorial differentiation" (p. 54). Something that needs to be brought up when stating this is: it is not about replicating European dynamics (the author's empirical basis) in Latin America, but to search, upon one's conclusion, how the social differentiation movement and its manifestations (such as cause, consequence and intermediation) come to be, in the city space.

Sposito (2017), basing himself on Lefebvre, states that "spatial practices do have a dialectic relation to space, since it is what it produces, and though slowly, ends up appropriating it." Therefore, it is possible to infer that space and time are basic categories for understanding spatial practices (of people). This does confront itself, as one reiterates what was already said, through spatial rationales coming from companies, which relatively condition spatial practices. To this, it i salso possible to add offers and goods, which also are conditioning elements of spatial practices, since goods need to be reached, and in order to accommodate this need, mobility (both spatial and social) participates as a condition and a motivation for consumption.

These movements of geographical nature may be synthesized, in their development, in the following manner:
- "The spatial logic of companies is completely guided by intentionalities", while spatial practices, "despite being loaded with intentionalities, are several and conducted by a much greater number" and "diverse with social subjects";
- "Spatial practices are directly associated to daily life";
- companies' spatial logic require planning, while spatial practices are fraught with objectivity and subjectivity;
- "Rationales are more economic and practices are more social and political;
- "There are differences in the geographical scales under which these actions are performed" (Sposito, 2017, p. 638-639).
According to this same author, the city restructures itself for different reasons:
- Urban dispersion in middle cities has taken place, systematically, since 1970's;
- Dispersion is guided both by the location choices

of housing programs financed by the government or through private initiatives which have been implementing urban allotments. City growth in territorial terms is mainly due to the transformation of rural land into urban land, combining conflicts and complementarities between different agents with the goal of profiting from the land. This has in fact heightened socio-spatial segregation, by increasing forms of segmentation of residential use of the urban space as well as the space-time distance of urbanites in regards to the main city centers. This urban dynamic is not unique to large-scale or major cities but may indeed be also detected in middle cities.

3.1 The city, the center and centrality

The city center, by definition, consists of a particular content made up of economic, ideological and political-institutional levels, which may be the city or urban centers within the urban network (Whitacker, 2017, p. 170-171); the area itself being a "convergence of economic, population and data fluxes" (Sposito & Lozano, 2017, p. 2), having historical mobility not only from its shape but also from a content point of view. City centers are defined by the convergence of economic fluxes, people and information, which are modified with time due to the changes in the way land is occupied. On the other hand, centrality is understood, as far as we are concerned, as a statement by Sposito (2013), not as a place in the city, but as "conditions and expressions of a center that an area is able to exert and represent" (p. 73). To further emphasize: if the city center is the denser area in terms of commercial activities and services (usually more verticalized in comparison to other areas), its negation are the periphery and sub-center areas. The relation between the center, the periphery and sub-centers may be identified as being a trait of centrality. That is why central areas are "spaces which anchor the constitution of centralities, though are not one and the same" since "there is no center unless it reveals its own centrality" (Sposito, 2013, p. 73). In summary, "if the center is revealed by what is located in its territory, *centrality* reveals itself by what is moved within this territory, thus gaining relevance the understanding of centrality, within the conceptual plan, under a prevalent light, regarding the temporal dimension of reality" (Sposito, 2013, p. 73-74).

The same author (Sposito, 2013) goes on to distinguish the concepts of multi-centrality and poli-centrality. Multi-centrality is equivalent to "more

than one commercial and services concentration area in a city" (p. 74), whilst policentrality represents the "more recently observed dynamics" when it comes to greater commercial and services surfaces "which redefine the spatial structure that had come to establish itself steadily over time" (p. 75), thus exercising "attraction over the whole of the city" or perhaps serving as a polarizing agent of other cities in the urban surrounding (p. 75). This dialectic relation between the center and the periphery, the center and centrality, as well as between multi and policentrality is reason enough to redefine consumption standards and spatial practices, thus altering the content of the main center of the city.

The medium-sized cities studied here, are currently, multicentric, and in some cases policentric, since new choices are "those carried out by large incorporations responsible for the implementation of new commercial and service surfaces" (in accordance with defined economic mindsets) that "do not seek out the city, but expect and carry out actions so that the city and its inhabitants seek them out instead" (Sposito, 2013, p. 77-78), which in turn also conditions spatial practices of people, be they individuals or collectively.

The emergence of central areas aside from the main center is the result of new location choices of large commercial and services groups (generally of an outside capital city to those cities - often moved by foreign capital, to be more precise), such as shopping centers, supermarkets, multiple branch chains (e.g.: appliances) and franchise systems. This process multiplies urban centralities and potencializes

socio-spatial fragmentation processes, as the city restructures itself through location choices regarding territorial differentiation of urban space values. In other words, the city and social happenings form a pair that gets dialectically closer and farther within space and time and indeed manifests itself via the changes in spatial forms.

This article draws examples in order to study new spatial practices through the cities of Presidente Prudente, Marília and Ribeirão Preto, all located in the state of São Paulo, during the period between 2000 and 2010 (v. images. 3 & 4). By using the reference of population growth, Ribeirão Preto is situated in an area of relative growth, yet Presidente Prudente and Marília are both located in areas of relative decline. From an economic standpoint (value added by industries), all three cities are found in areas of relative expansion, with Ribeirão Preto being in an area of relatively greater growth than the remaining two others.

This comparison serves to show that space and time are different between the three cities, despite the fact that they belong to the same socio-spatial formation resulting from the formation of a coffee complex and which marked the strongest industrialization process of the country. These economic moments set a mark during both the 19th and 20th centuries and were instrumental for structuring the São Paulo urban network and the conformation of the larger territorial dynamics in the state.

Moreover, Image 5 demonstrates that the three cities may be classified as middle and distant from the greater urban clusters in the state and far from the metropolis.

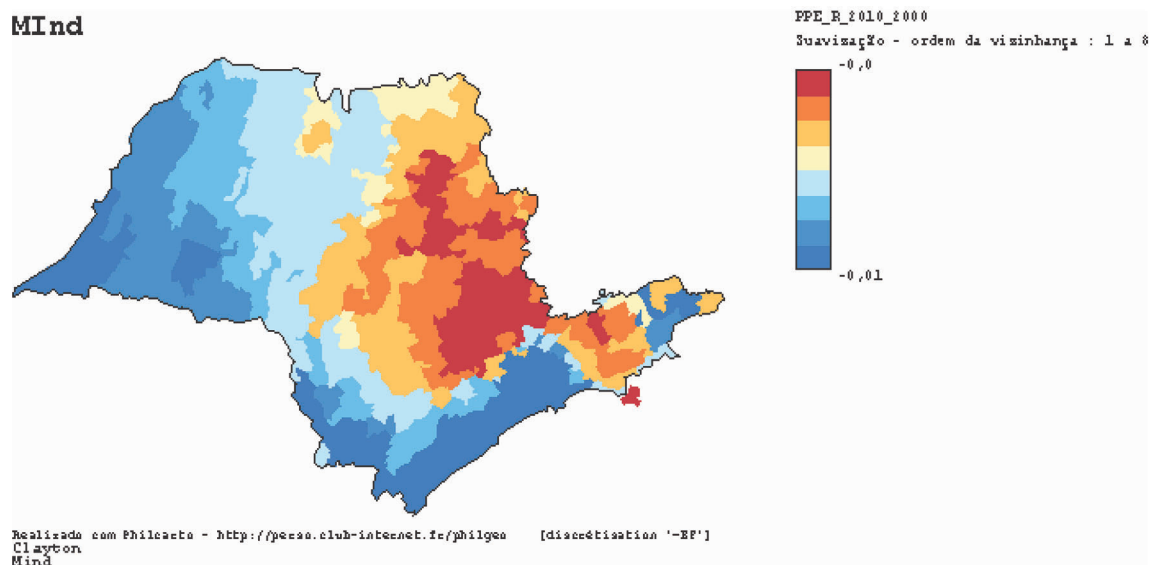Image 3. State of São Paulo: Population growth (2000-2010)

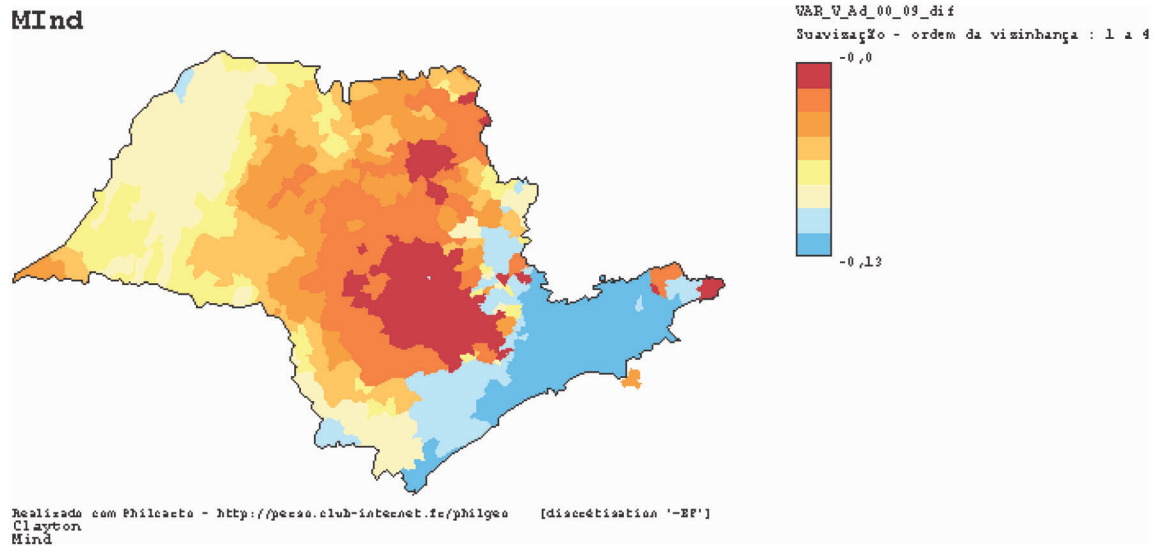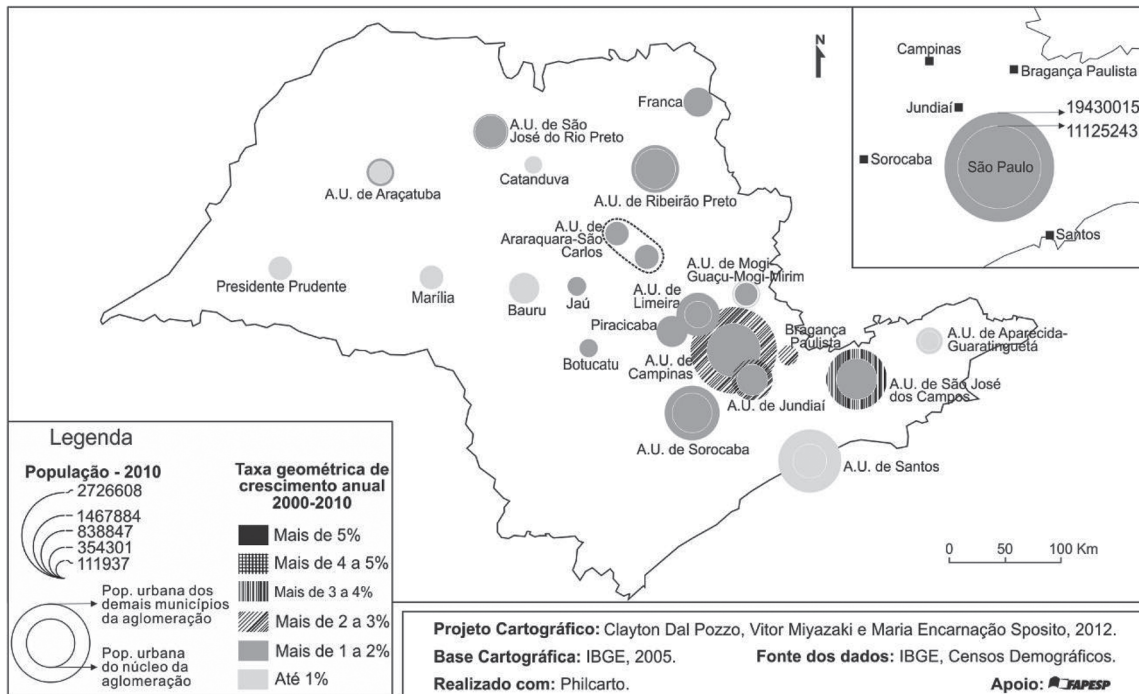Image 4. State of São Paulo: Value added (production of goods) (2000-2010)

Image 5. State of São Paulo: Urban clusters and middle cities (2010).

4. Third level: case studies

The location of points of sale chosen by companies from the retail market is mainly defined by corporate strategies, which in turn are conditioned by their own economic rationales established by the capitalist production system. For Sposito (2017), one should not neglect "the efforts made by companies so that over time options become homogenized, hence relying on major brands" (p. 631). This means that the role of large businesses "formalizes" a type of structuring of the urban system (in terms of urban hierarchy and heterarchy) and the city (from the stance of points of sale location),

even though we hold, as a focus, the socio-spatial conditions and forms of mobility in the city which in turn condition choices by means of consumption (through both quantity and quality) as well as how individuals traverse the city.

One consequence of this movement is the contradictory trend to homogenization and urban differentiation. In the first case, the repetition of brands, architecture, colors and manners of service demonstrate a trend towards pasteurizing daily life, thus seeking to uniform behaviors. In the second case, the differentiation is territorialized due to the diverse potentialities of consumption through dif-

ferent social groups as well as their distribution by city, i.e., the city distinguishes itself, territorially, in high income neighborhoods (be they in closed communities, or high-end residential buildings) and on the other end of the spectrum, the neighborhoods where underprivileged populations survive, either in areas close to the city centers or far away from them.

This brings forth a repetition of movements and behaviors. At times, in exchange areas (shops), others in areas of displacement of people (mass transport, private vehicles, etc.). This repetition may constitute an urban mobility system that crystallizes and conditions the decision-making process of individuals in their needs to move and shop (as an important moment in the consumption process).

4.1 The Presidente Prudente case

The municipality of Presidente Prudente (image 6) would be a halfway case, with a strong main center providing a high concentration of commerce and service activities, as well as with the formation of sub-centers, the main one in this case being carried away by Prudenshopping. The municipality of Presidente Prudente boasts a population of 220,599 inhabitants, as estimated the 2014 IBGE[2] census. At present it is one of the main industrial, cultural and service poles west of São Paulo.

The city is articulated by four main roads: Manoel Goulart, Washington Luiz, Coronel José Soares Marcondes and Brasil avenues, which end up crossing each other, thus forming a square, concentrating the core of the main center, which contains the greatest proportion of commerce and services in the city. Manoel Goulart avenue links the main center with the western part of the city. This avenue is the location axis for retail and service activities of greater importance, such as a number of banking branches, furniture stores, car dealerships, restaurants and others. Washington Luiz Ave. also links the west end to the city center, though there one will find more sophisticated venues, including designer brand clothing and footwear stores. Located in this avenue are several of the city's private medical and dental clinics. Coronel Marcondes Ave. on the other hand, cuts through the center, linking the north and south of the town. This avenue presents numerous public institutions, the Santa Casa Hospital as well as a plethora of private medical and dental clinics, banks, several chains of drugstores,

and a great deal of less specialized retail stores. Brasil Ave. sets the the limit between the main center with the east part of the town, and specializes in paint and automotive parts shops, and in more modest sense, it is also represented by the city's street vendors and bazaars[3].

Despite Presidente Prudente being of the same size as Marília (next in line for this study) in terms of lanuse and occupation?, it displays a process of decentralization of retail and service activities and this is also due to the fact that it is a regional center of importance (Regional Capital C, as per the REGIC classification). As the main center continues to concentrate the greater part of retail and service activities in the city, this is where one finds points of sale from some of the major household appliance retail chains in the country, such as Ponto Frio, Magazine Luiza, Casas Bahia and Lojas Pernambucanas, which become intertwined with regional chains as Cybelar, J. Mahfuz and Romera, as well as clothing, footwear, eyewear retail shops and other banks, e.g., Banco do Brasil, Bradesco, Itaú, Santander, etc. There is also a trend toward decentralization around Manuel Goulart Ave., where Prudenshopping and numerous department stores are located, such as Walt-Mart, Muffato and Maxxi Atacado. This avenue is then converted into an extension of the main center, since there is where you will find a variety of retail activities and services. Prudenshopping was built in 1990 and covers an area of 85,000 m², with 208 stores, including a supermarket, Carrefour, and a number of anchor shops, such as Casas Bahia, Magazine Luiza, Ri Happy, Centauro, C&A, Marisa, Renner, Riachuelo McDonald´s, Habib´s etc. Aside from Prudenshopping, the city contains another shopping center called Parque Shopping, inaugurated in 1986, which houses numerous stores retailing goods such as clothing, footwear, accessories, and others. The crowning stores at this location are namely Lojas Americanas and Super Muffato hypermarket.

In Presidente Prudente, the areas which may be deemed sub-centers either follow the main circulation accessways or are found in neighboring areas farther from the main center. With its 20 hypermarkets and supermarkets in the city, the area close to Prudenshopping became a sub-center of major importance to commercial density due to the fact that it boasts three hypermarkets.

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2. Data available online at: http://www.ibge.gov.br/home/estatistica/populacao/estimativa 2014/

3. Area administered by the municipal public office (located at the Bandeiras square) which congregates sales booths peddling bargain goods at a lower quality than those found in proper stores.

Image 6. Presidente Prudente – SP. LOCATION OF RETAILER TRADE ESTABLISHMENTS
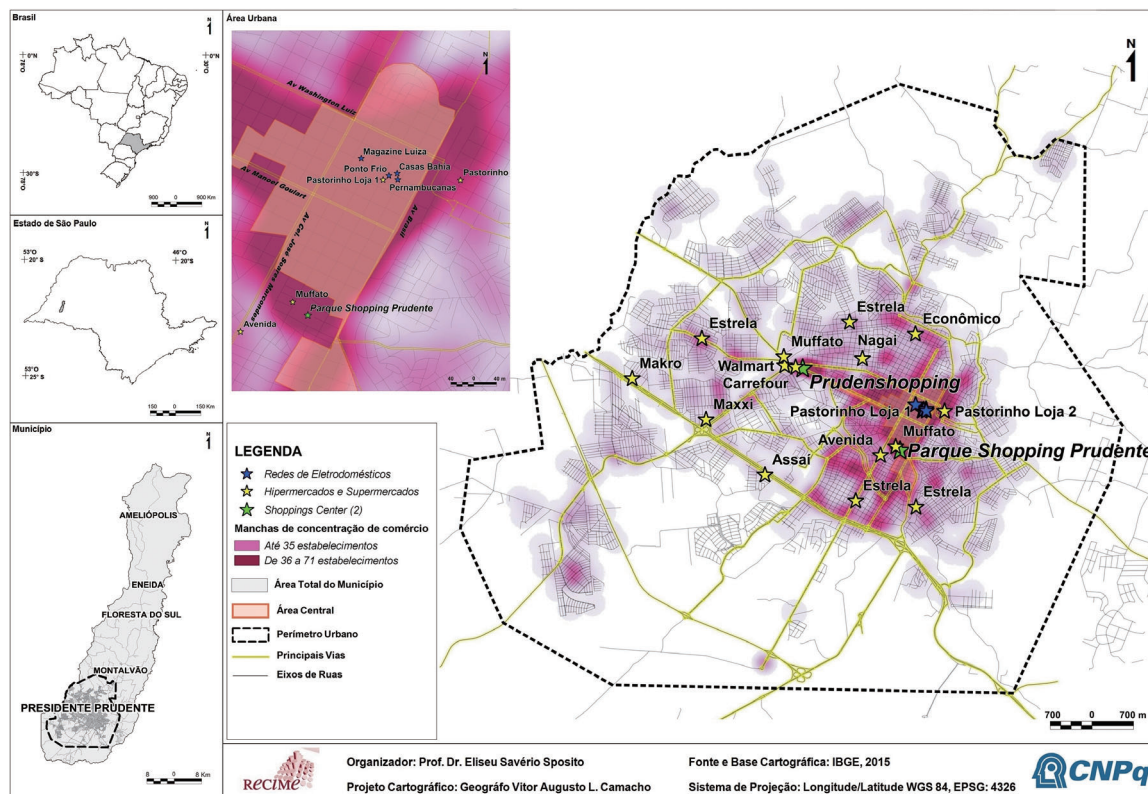
"Social differentiation becomes evident under the division of the social space, yet the role of the main center is still paramount, since it functions as an indicator that there is an important area in the city for the whole of its consumers" especially when the consumption of goods and services stands out from the rest (Sposito, 2017, p. 646).

The displacement of consumers demonstrates that the distances are vast within the city. Consumers commute from far corners (north and west areas) to, from top to bottom order, Prudenshopping, the main center, Parque Shopping and Parque do Povo. Shopping and leisure are the main reasons for the commute. (img. 7).

This research was based on different types of consumers, representing the socio-economic diversity of the population, in order to express mobility as well as the social differences found in the city. This is made ever more clear on img. 8.

Image 8 shows where consumers come from as well as characteristics of the urban space, starting from social groups with a monthly income of 20+ minimum salaries, as opposed to those who earn less than two. The centralities are defined by consumption and leisure, considering different types of

interviewees[4].

The characteristics of consumer movement in Presidente Prudente, are the following: 1) the main center with its shopping appeal (of a more diversified character and lower prices), though with lesser intensity when compared to other areas; 2) the formation of two important sub-centers (Prudenshopping and Parque Shopping) for shopping and an area with a strong leisure appeal (Parque do Povo); 3) these two points indicate the growing role of new centralities in the city; 4) lastly, Presidente Prudente exerts an important role from a regional standpoint due to the convergence of consumers from cities that makeup its urban network.

4.2 The Marília case[5]

The municipality of **Marília** (image 9) contains an estimated population of 230,336 inhabitants, according to 2014 IBGE data[6], and is classified by REGIC as a Regional Capital C (v. img. 1). Some of the highlights of this municipality are its industry, commerce, and service companies, which distribute their products to the national and interna-

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4. In this article we will not expose nor analyze the interviews performed, but present the conclusions deduced from them as well as the observations from field research.
5. For the description of the city of Marília, the study is based on Sposito and Lozano (2017) – unpublished text.
6. Data available online at: http://www.ibge.gov.br/home/estatistica/populacao/estimativa 2014/

Image 7. Presidente Prudente – SP. MAIN CONSUMPTION INDICATIONS BY CONSUMER PROFILE. 2013
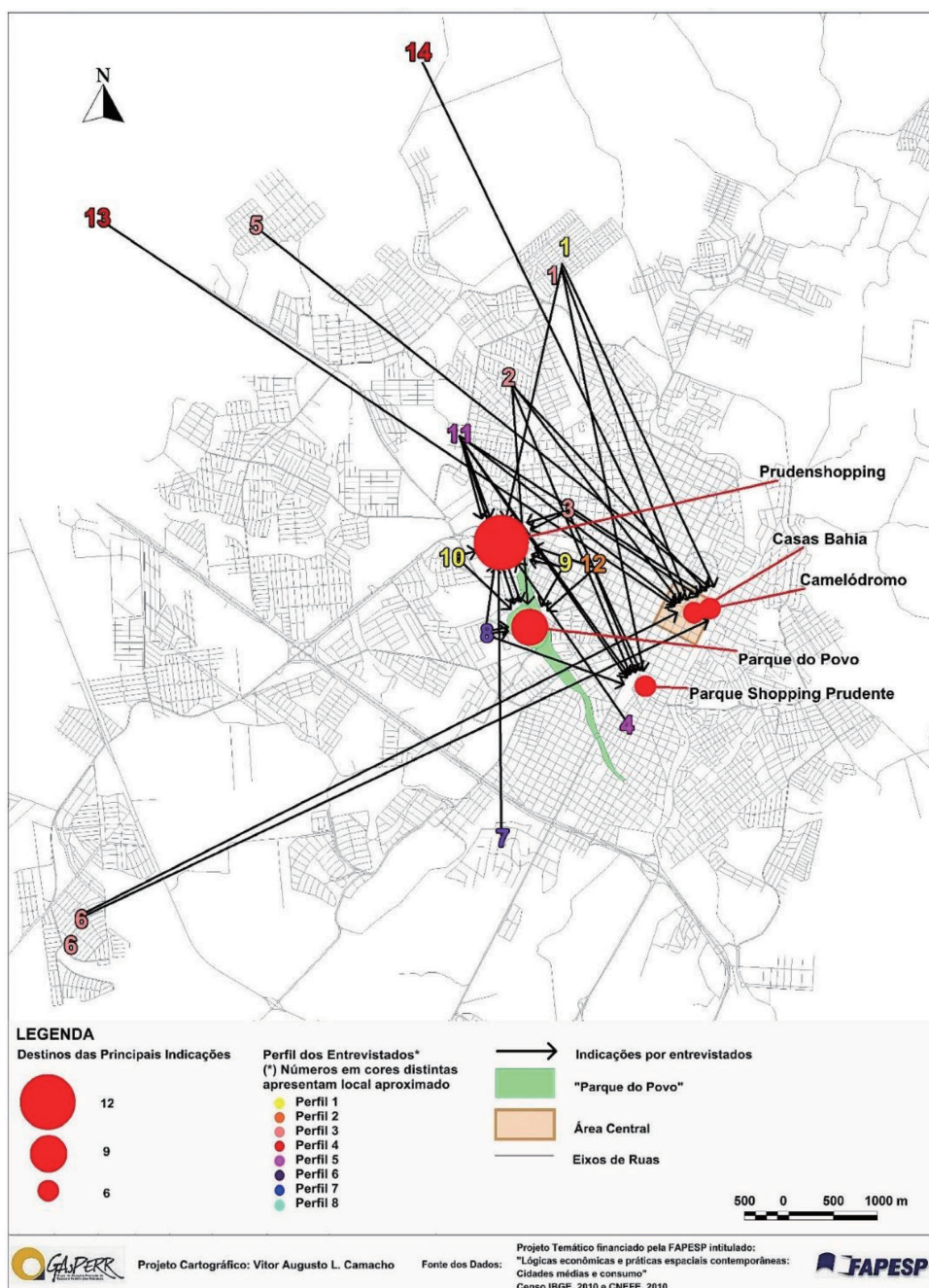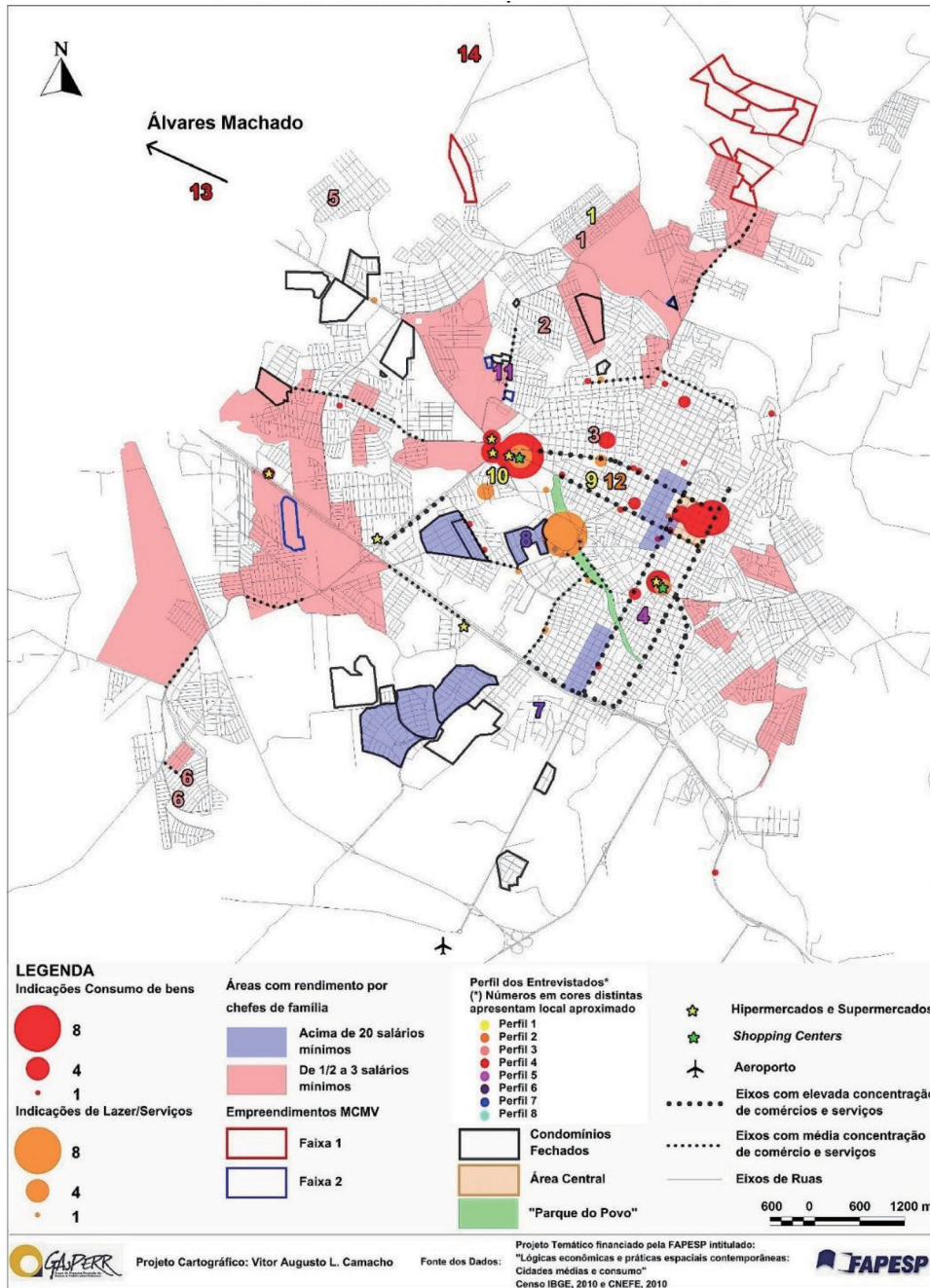
tional markets; this explains why it is known as the National Foods Capital.

Among the main roadway axes in the city are República Ave., which cuts through the city from north to south; Tiradentes and Sampaio Vidal Aves. That start from the center and head toward the east side of the town; das Esmeraldas Ave. that runs parallel to Tiradentes and begins in the center and runs eastbound, and Rio Branco Ave. which crosses other avenues and also has its starting point downtown and heads southbound. Sampaio Vidal Ave. is a roadway specialized in the retail and services sector. Here one finds a variety of of the main banking agencies in the country, such as Banco do Brasil,

Bradesco, Caixa Econômica Federal, HSBC Premier, amongst others. Tiradentes Ave., on the other hand, is the main gateway from those coming into the city from Interstate SP-294 (which leads to Bauru and São Paulo), serving as linking point between the center and other neighborhoods from the southern and southeast sections of the city. This avenue is comprised of a number of car dealerships, gas stations, banking branches, and others. Das Esmeraldas Ave. is located in a higher end of part of town and serves as the gateway to Esmeralda Shopping, the closed communities whose population is considered of high income, and the Bus Station, having crossed the railway line. Situated in this av-

enue are some of the most luxurious shops in town. Rio Branco Ave. cuts through the most vertical area of the city and is an important roadway that binds the center to various locations of the city; the university campus and south and west of Marília districts, for instance.

In terms of the location of appliance store points of sale, major retail groups (chains of national reach, e.g., Magazine Luiza, Ponto Frio, Casas Bahia) as well as those of more regional operations (such as the case of Cybelar and J. Mahfuz) have placed their stores in the main center (and, in this particular case, the more traditional center) area of the city, precisely on the *calçadão* sidewalk area,

also known as Rua São Luiz. In this area of the city, along with other major appliance stores, are also located key department stores, such as, for instance: Casas Pernambucanas (which also deals in household appliances) as well as renowned furniture, clothing, and footwear shops as Riachuelo, World Tennis and Renner, to name a few. It was observed a highly intense specialization process in the retail market, characterized by the conglomeration of more popular and sophisticated retail chains in one single space, be it of a local, regional or national nature.

Marilia Shopping, located in the north area of the town, was first built in the year 2000. With a to-

tal used area of 60,000 m2, it holds upwards of 170 shops; amongst them clothing, footwear stores of nationally recognized brands, as well as a number of other shops displaying accessories, toys, foods, beverages, etc. When it comes to appliances, there are only two points of sale, one being Lojas Americanas and the other Polishop. In this sense, this shopping center does not characterize, albeit for now, a sufficiently important centrality in the sense of its capacity to compete with the center area, thus allowing us to state that Marília is still very much structured by its main center.

From the interviews carried out, consumption and the movement of people in Marília may be characterized as follows: 1) the city restructures itself through the construction of closed residential communities that are distanced from each other; 2) the division of the social space, as evidenced by these characteristics, does not fragment its center-periphery relations due to the fact that the main center still maintains an important role for its set of consumers, since it is where most of them end up converging (v. consumption of goods, red circles); in other words, this is still a typical structure defined by the center-periphery pair, which defines a city with strong monocentrism; 3) this results in a certain differentiation in regard to the search between the main center and the defined sub-centers featuring shopping centers, as much as in the price difference in goods offered, which shows a social differentiation in the consumption of goods (in Marília, sub-centralities are defined by Marilia Shopping and WalMart); 4) a socio-spatial distance is clearly observed between wealthier and poorer classes.

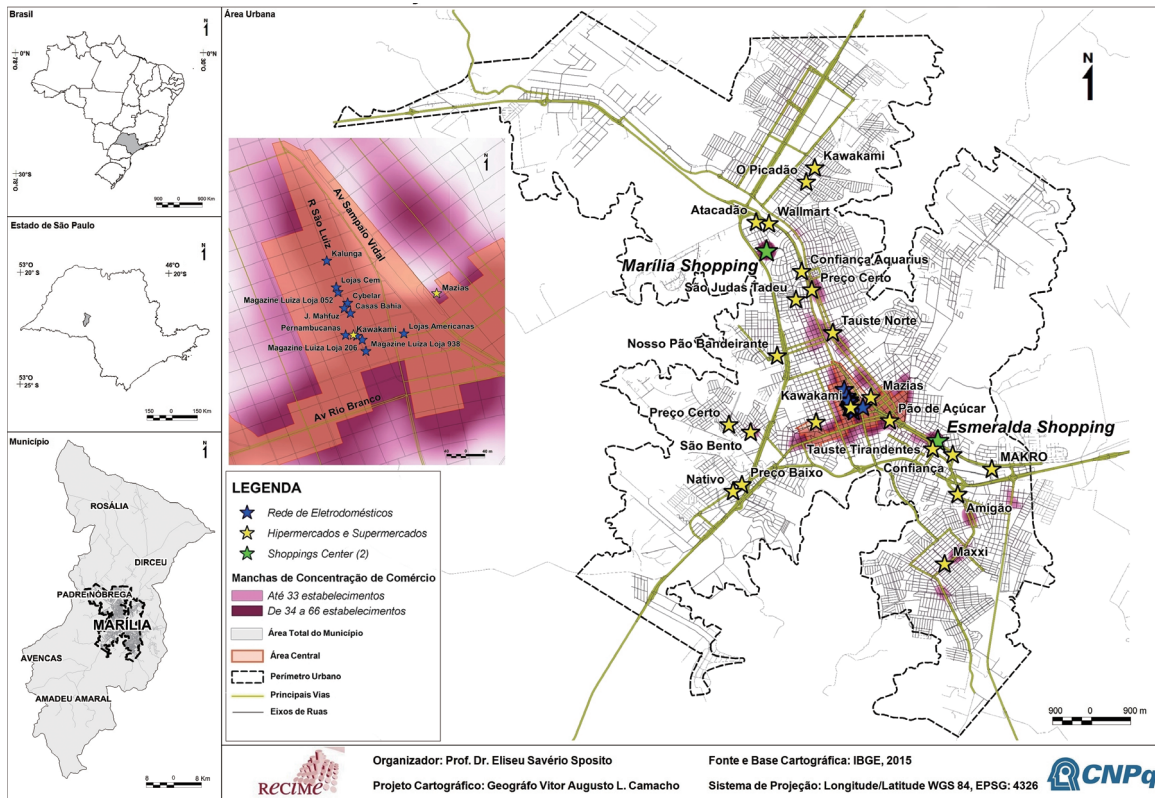Image 9. Marília – SP. LOCATION OF RETAILER TRADE ESTABLISHMENTS
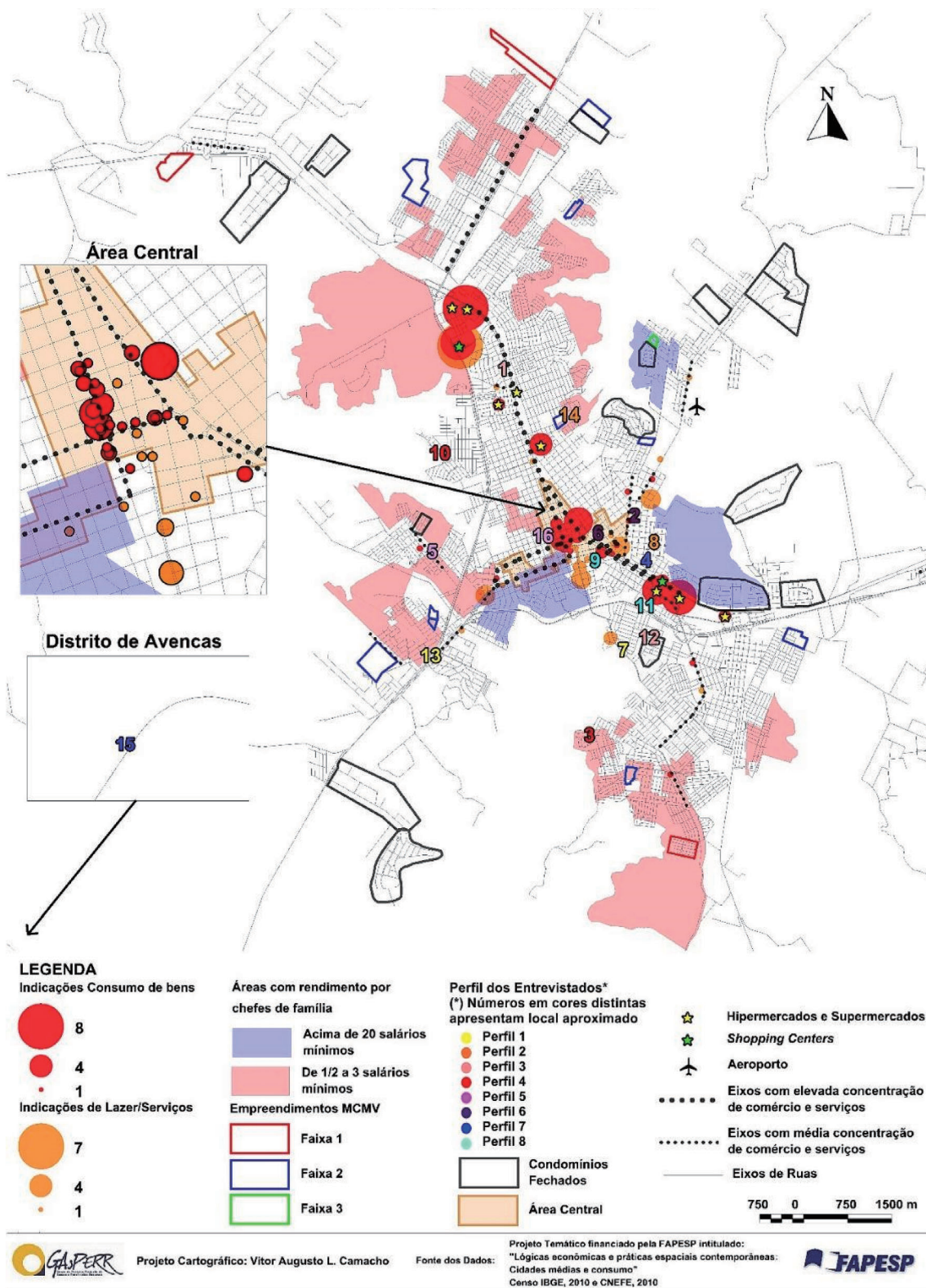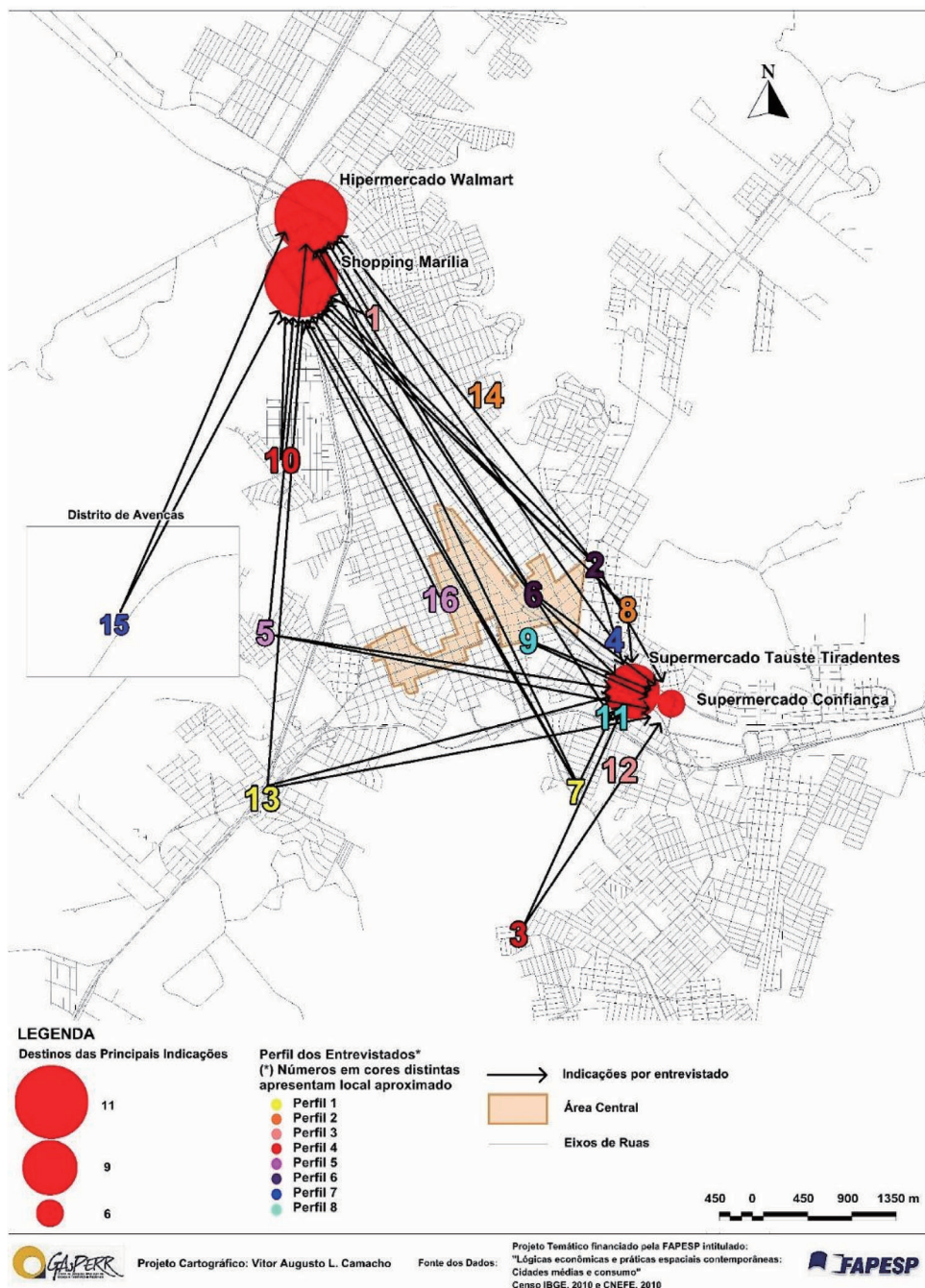
The Ribeirão Preto case

The municipality of Ribeirão Preto, as per data from IBGE, had an estimated population of 658,059 inhabitants in 2014[7], thus turning it into one of the municipalities of greatest growth within the State. Ribeirão Preto is classified as a Regional Capital B, as per REGIC, and is configured as an attraction nucleus for industrial, commercial and service activities region, whose influence extrapolates the limits of the governing region itself, thus extending into other cities such as Barretos, Araraquara, São Carlos, Franca and others from the state of São Paulo and even other states, such as into the cities of São Sebastião do Paraíso, in the state of Minas Gerais.

In general terms, it is a city that is undergoing an evident process of deconcentration of functions, due to the very accelerated process of urban expansion that has been lately felt. The city's growth process has increased the spatial segregation processes in the population: there are a great deal of shanty towns that, little by little, are going through land settlement processes. The area with the lowest income per capita is located in the northern

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7. Data currently available onine at: http://www.ibge.gov.br/home/estatistica/populacao/estimativa 2014/

region, and, at present, contains a total population of 204,929 inhabitants. In contrast to all this, the southern and southeast areas are where one may find the wealthiest cut of the city's population.

The main development axis of Ribeirão Preto is Presidente Vargas avenue, which begins near the central region and extends itself throughout the southern district and is considered to be the greatest growth symbol of the city, in the area that goes from the intersection between Nove de Julho Ave. — initial landmark of Presidente Vargas — all the way to the South beltway, thus designing an important urban corridor, whose main vocations are retail and services. In this region are two main shopping centers, Ribeirão Shopping and the upscale Shopping Iguatemi Ribeirão Preto. The east of town (whose most symptomatic name is Ribeirânia) is also drawn into that direction of strongest real estate expansion, i.e., the Novo Shopping Center.

The location of appliance chains points of sale is similar to that of other researched cities: most of the more conventional stores, be it on a national or regional scale, may be found in the city center. In the first case we have Magazine Luiza, Casas Bahia, Ponto Frio, Lojas Pernambucanas, Lojas Americanas and, second, Lojas Cem, Lojas Xavier and Ricardo Eletro. The starting point for the decentralization process in Ribeirão Preto may be identified in the southern portion of the main center, precisely

in the Higienópolis borough, where Shopping Santa Úrsula is located, as well as points of sale from department chains such as Ponto Frio, Fast Shop and Lojas Americanas. Situated in the south-southwest areas of town are Shopping Ribeirão and Iguatemi, respectively, which house shops from such major chains as Ponto Frio, FNAC, Fast Shop and Poli Shop, whose main target demographic are higher income families. In the eastern portion, commonly known as Ribeirânia, one will find Novo Shopping Center which contains a diversified *mix* of stores, amongst which are Casas Bahia, Magazine Luiza, Lojas Americanas, Kalunga, etc.

Hyper and supermarkets which, depending on their size and dimensions may also sell appliances, are distributed throughout the vicinities of the city, primarily in the central and main central neighboring regions.

There are a total of 40 hyper and supermarkets in Riberirão Preto, which, as discussed in the previous cities, are distributed across the urban sprawl, with some of them being in periphery areas of the urban mesh or perhaps along certain roadways.

Image 12. Ribeirão Preto – SP. LOCATION OF RETAILER TRADER ESTABLISHMENTS

Lifetime of urban, regional and natural systems: examining examples from Brazil and Japan
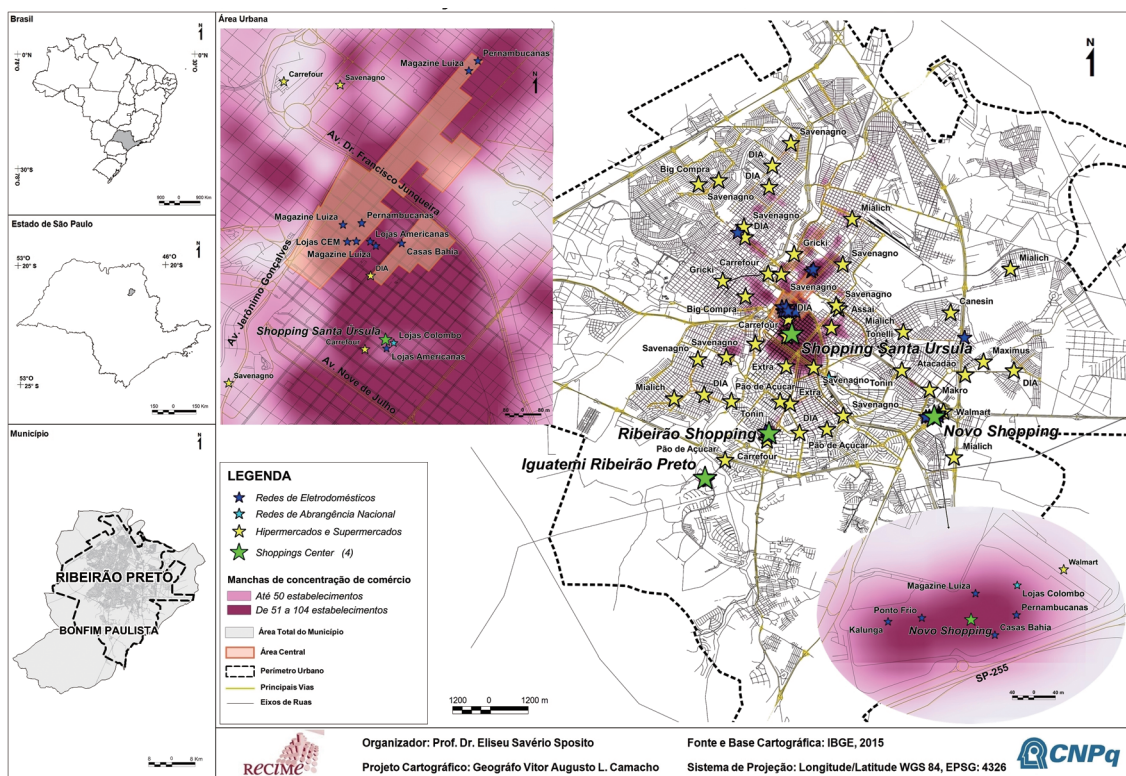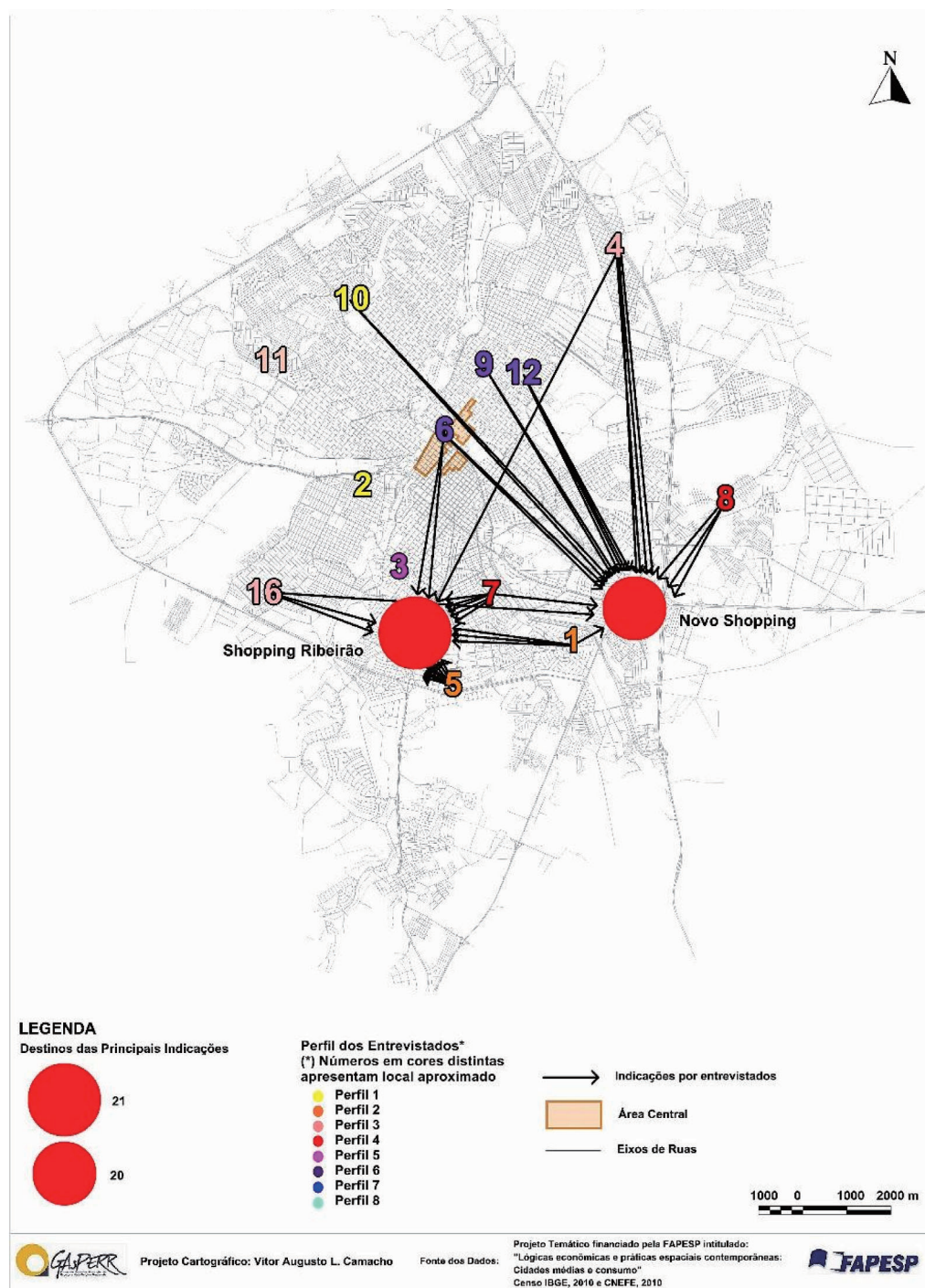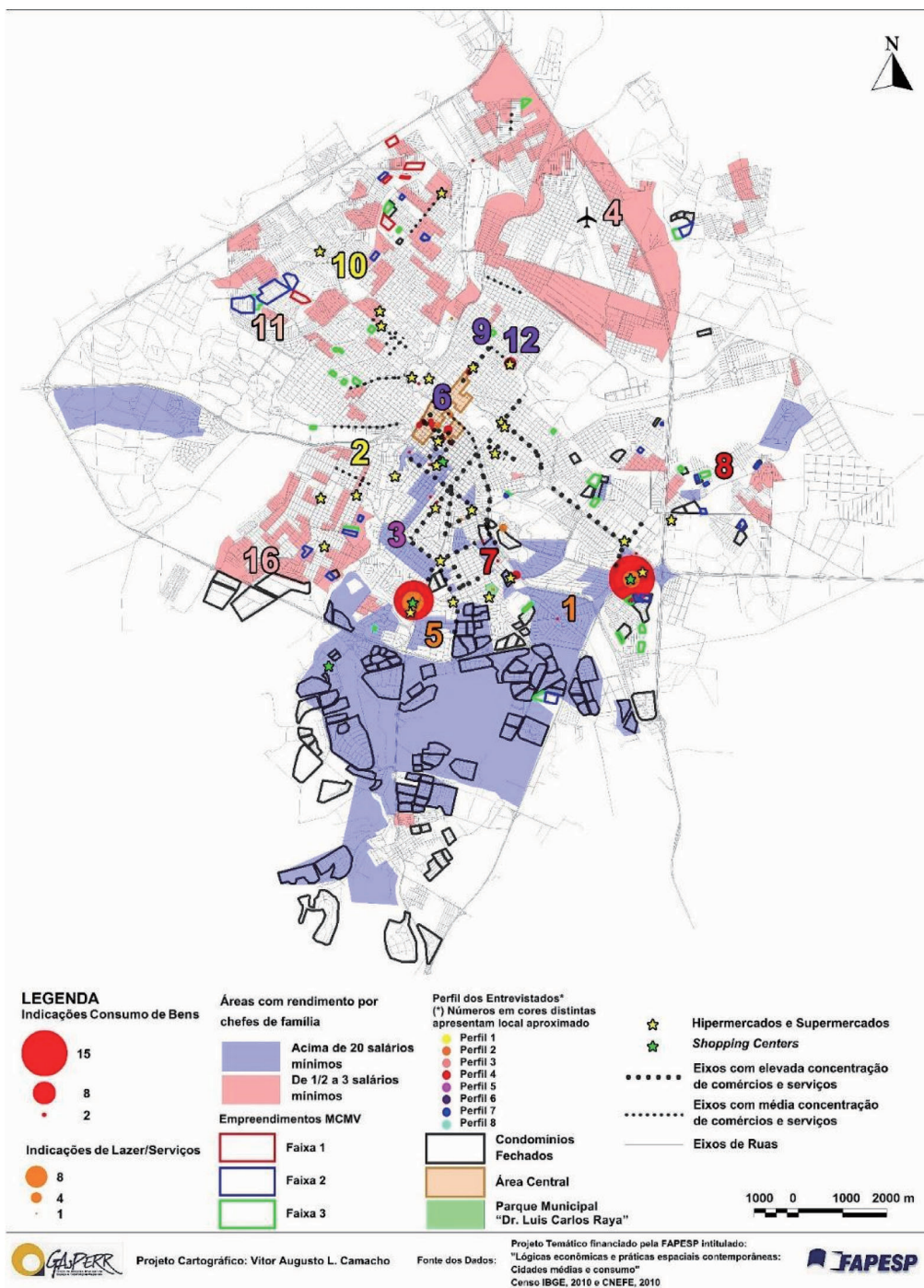
Image 14. Ribeirão Preto – SP. CONSUMPTIO MAP – 2013.

In general terms, in Ribeirão Preto: 1) the loss of importance of the main center is paramount to comprehending the restructuring of the city; 2) sub-centers are the new areas which draw in consumers, and are represented by the shopping centers located south of the town; where those with monthly incomes of 20+ minimum salaries reside; 3) socio-spatially speaking , the city presents itself dichotomized between north and south; the north being home to most of the underprivileged population, with the south being the polar opposite (where coincidentally one also finds a predominance of guarded residential areas; an indicator of the ongoing trend towards the socio-spatial fragmentation[8] of the city).

5. Conclusions

From a methodological point of view, the interviews carried out took into consideration different types of subjects and their different locations in the

8. Socio-spatial fragmentation is here understood, in general terms, as a differentiation in space and consumption between social groups which distance themselves economically and socially, thus becoming specific living areas and areas where residents don't meet.

city. The use of cartography allowed for the visualization of differences in the urban space, as well as the origin of consumers interviewed.

From the point of view of each city, they structure themselves with the power imbued by the main center and the formation of sub-centers, thus displaying different relations of density. Form and process are empiricized by this data. The cities presented (Presidente Prudente, Marília and Ribeirão Preto) demonstrated differing structures: Marília has an important role exercised by the main center, exhibiting a persistent center-periphery relation in its structure of monocentrality; Presidente Prudente shows a trend toward policentrality, resulting from the separation of shopping and leisure areas and the emergence of two sub-centers, as evidenced by the shopping centers; Ribeirão Preto presents the city with two very different areas (north, with a predominantly impoverished population, in contrast to the walled-community, mostly wealthy southern residents) as well as the strong polarization from the sub-centers, as represented by shopping centers.

Even if located in an area of the same socio-spatial formation, the three cities are characterized by different dynamics in regards to their structure.

From an urban space standpoint, the comparison of the types of consumers with extreme strata (those who earn incomes higher than the equivalent of 20 minimum wage a month and those who earn less than two), result in centers and sub-centrality processes that show varied social dimensions of the urban space from the three analyzed cities, as well as, different trends and magnitudes toward socio-spatial fragmentation. These are in different moments marked in the urban space, since the three cities possess center-periphery relations, the formation of sub-centers and a densification of walled residential areas.

From an urban perspective, the issue of the systemic interaction between city structure and consumption demonstrate a relevant regional role with a strong participation of each city's residents, as well as, the participation of residents from those cities which form their regional network, without becoming an urban heterarchy which is more evident for business activities (commercial and industrial) and not for individuals.

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