

Title:

Claiming the Street: Work and Consumption in 21st Century Public Spaces

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Abstract:

The street has become a critical site for action in the 21st century. In cities around the world, residents depend on contingent street work. At the same time, public officials attempt to create cities that appeal to moneyed classes. These interests align and conflict at different moments, giving street workers political leverage even though they continue to be vulnerable. Through organized advocacy and insurgent urbanism (Hou, 2010), more people are claiming rights to the city through public space use and activism.

Street vendors, street musicians and others who work in public face erratic enforcement of complex laws and harassment by property and business owners. Only a few countries grant residents the right to work in public spaces (Meneses-Reyes & Caballero-Juárez, 2014). These rights are aspatial and they do not guarantee rights to specific spaces during particular times. In the last decade, advocates for street vendors, musicians, food trucks and street markets have increasingly fought to decriminalize extralegal activity (such as informal street vending) and redesign cities' regulatory frameworks and public spaces to accommodate street work. This includes peer-to-peer exchanges such as Airbnb and Uber, which use web-based public spaces to exchange services.

Using evidence from organizing around sidewalk vending, food trucks, and Airbnb, this paper examines how advocates use both rights-based claims and needs-based claims to demand access to urban spaces for everyday use and exchange. While street workers often use the street without authorization or against the law, the organizing legitimizes workers' rights to the streets and responsibilities for public engagement while it also questions municipal authority over the street.

These struggles make demands for new modes of citizenship where all residents can use urban spaces without authorization. These movements have an ambivalent position and

make ambivalent arguments. They align with the aesthetics of the creative city and with processes that accept contingent work and valorize contingent workers. This has led municipalities to adopt post-revanchist policies, or regulatory and enforcement approaches that, at times, allow more activities while at other times are punitive (Huang, Xue and Li, 2014). Simultaneously, they challenge the state's authority to determine what is allowable. This can suggest new ways to envision cities as shared and sharing spaces (McLaren and Agyeman, 2015) but it also has the potential to further weaken local states in a neoliberal era.

This paper makes two specific contributions. It interrogates the changing meaning of street workers' claims in an era that values individualism and entrepreneurship along with craft production and localism. It also examines local manifestations of globalism where work is being restructured, as more residents depend on contingent work and therefore struggle to legitimize it. Contemporary street movements make formal demands to recognize people's rights to the street, moving beyond aspatial rights to claim access to particular spaces and to shape a public city. In doing so, they are refashioning both work and citizenship.

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