

Chapter 12

Space Syntax Beyond Cairo Street Markets: An Application of a Theory on Socio- Spatial Contemporary Practices

Amany Ramadan Arisha

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9903-7350>

Arab Academy for Science, Technology, and Maritime Transport, Egypt

Nancy Mostafa Abd El-Moneim

Arab Academy for Science, Technology, and Maritime Transport, Egypt

ABSTRACT

Street vending is a growing controversial phenomenon in urban environments. It is a survival strategy and an economic opportunity for countless numbers of marginalized vendors. However, the temporal presence of vendors is portrayed as the source of substantial urban issues, which detract from the quality of the urban public space and the public life of individuals. This chapter aims to propose a practical approach to understand the impact of vendors' temporal presence on the quality of urban space and social life. By space syntax theory, this study utilizes pragmatic methods in the fields of social and human sciences; to analyze the socio-spatial and temporal attributes of the vending phenomenon in relation to urban users' movement in a case study street market at Cairo. The findings introduce a syntactic methodology that highlights the profound relationship between users and informal urban markets to be applied in diverse contexts.

INTRODUCTION

Cairo Street Markets are a day-to-day reality in all countries especially the developing countries (Brown, 2006). It is a common occupation of selling or retailing merchandise and services in urban spaces including streets, alleyways, avenues, boulevards, parking lots, street intersections, sidewalks, and public parks (Bromley, 2000; Yatmo, 2008).

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The public trading phenomenon is a representative of an activity mostly initiated by unemployment, rapid urbanization, disproportionate resource allocation, and lack of sustainable development (Kafafy, 2016; Li et al., 2018; Sarpong & Nabubie, 2015). It is the most effective opportunity for income generation in cities for countless numbers of marginalized vendors, who encounter limited chances for getting a formal work (Bhowmik, 2005; Donovan, 2008; Forkuor et al., 2017; Roever & Skinner, 2016). This income generation has positioned trading in urban environments as a survival strategy and a mean for a fair livelihood against the gross inequality and exploitation of the socioeconomic system in cities of hardship (Abusaada & Elshater, 2019).

Moreover, street vendors are the bedrock of the urban economy where each successive layer above utilizes vendors' presence to their advantage (Brown, 2006; Rajagopal, 2010a). In the sense that, vendors adapt their trading activities to meet the urban users' socio-economic needs (Bhowmik, 2005; Rajagopal, 2010b). Vending operations varies depending on the events in the space, the weather, and time of the day (Bromley, 2000), as well as potential customers' flow (Reid et al., 2010; Wongtada, 2014). Thus, vending activity is a practical approach to cater for seasonal, sporadic, and unusual demands of customers (Sarpong & Nabubie, 2015).

The street vending practice constitutes a crucial component of the informal economy (Roever & Skinner, 2016). This economic informality implies that even though vendors are associated with the offer of legitimate or socially acceptable merchandise and services, they lack the presence of any formal registration, taxation or licensing (Bouhali, 2018; Kafafy, 2017). In this specific situation, the term 'informal' seems, by all accounts, to be depicted as 'illegal' (Cross, 2000; Graaff & Ha, 2015). Missing the fact that the vendors' utilization of urban environments for their own livelihoods is a grassroots initiative that represents a remarkable case of self-improvement for those confronting hardship to comply with the unreasonable bureaucracy through their meager personal assets (De Soto, 1989).

Furthermore, vending operations take place on public or private property that is not legitimately assigned for trading activities, and at least in part outside business regulation, planning codes, or other regulatory requirements (Brown et al., 2010). Yet, not only the constraints of having no formal access to a trading space that constitutes an urban issue, but also the concentration of vendors in a particular location creating a market-place that is called 'urban market' is the source of substantial urban problems (Bromley, 2000; Hays-Mitchell, 1994; Recio & Gomez, 2013). For instance, city image degradation, traffic congestion, pedestrian movement blockage, urban space deterioration, disorder, low levels of cleanness, vandalism, and so on (Anjaria, 2006; Bromley & Mackie, 2009; Crossa, 2009; Donovan, 2008), this has positioned street vending as an urban threat to the quality of the urban public space and the social life of individuals.

A street vendor is conceptualized as an individual who offers merchandise accessible to be purchased by the public people without having a permanent built-up structure or entity (Bhowmik, 2005). Therefore, street trading operations could be stationary or may be mobile (Bhowmik, 2005; Bromley, 2000).

In this manner, vendors are a temporal urban feature that could appear and vanish at any time and location beyond the initially intended planning, so detracting from the city form and its image (Yatmo, 2008). This situation is caused by the vendor physical and visual appearance in the urban environment (Yatmo, 2009). This temporal presence may turn into a violation of the functional zoning code and public order, creating conflicts between the temporary and the fixed activities as the temporal dimension of the urban experience is usually slighted in urban planning and design. Consequently, public trading is revealed as a contested activity between various social groups over the utilization of urban environments.

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