Cities in Asia by and for the People

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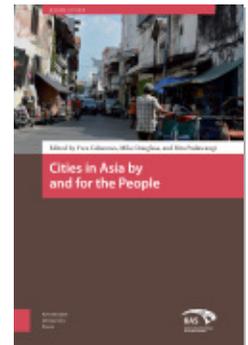Published by Amsterdam University Press

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10 Street Vending from the Right to the City Approach

The Appropriation of Bhadra Plaza

Lila Oriard Colin

Abstract

This chapter explores the kinds of spaces that street vending informally produces. Street vendors use space, but they also change it in a strategic way so that it better serves their commercial needs. By doing so, they generate efficient (market) spaces that might alter the nature and values of public space—a process not without tensions between the different stakeholders and users of the space. The chapter highlights the dialectic relation between street vending and public space. Bhadra Plaza in Ahmedabad's Old City is used as a case study to look at how street vendors have re-appropriated a space that was originally designed as a public plaza in the heart of the city's historical area, which obtained in 2017 a UNESCO World Heritage Site Nomination. The chapter considers two aspects: first, the political empowerment of certain groups of street vendors, especially the political threads that ensure their re-appropriation of the space. Second, it highlights the relationship between the groups' political power, the spatial patterns that drove the re-appropriation of space, and the process of codification to unveil the logic of the rules enforced by powerful groups and the benefits they receive from doing this. The central argument is that street vending is able to appropriate and shape space according to vendors' commercial interests. Henri Lefebvre's 'right to the city' and 'production of space' theory (1968, 1974) was used to examine the connections between the organization, empowerment and mobilization of street vendors' groups and the process of appropriation of public space from a grounded approach.

Keywords: street vendors, right to the city, appropriation, Bhadra Plaza, Ahmedabad

Figure 10.1   Maps of (a) India and (b) urban area of Ahmedabad
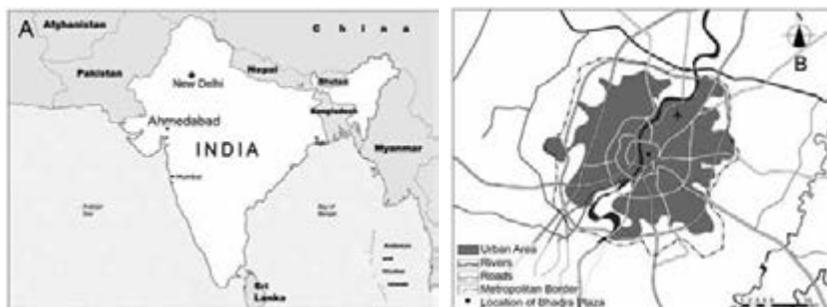
Source: Ariel Shepherd

1   Introduction

Street vending is a widespread activity in Global South cities despite its
lack of formal regulation. It contributes in a positive way to alleviating
poverty, supplying goods and services for low income groups, and creating
employment and business opportunities for vulnerable social groups (Brown
2006). Street vendors are able to make attractive commercial places such as
food markets, which function as places for social interaction, or specialized
street markets that offer a great diversity of commodities within the same
business line. In its different modalities, street vending is part of the social
and economic life of cities, an element that contributes to making the city
a collective construct.

    The integration of street vending into the city is, however, problematic.
This chapter explores how public space changes when groups related to
street vending take control and enforce their rules (codes) in favour of the
market's interests. I explore two of the main challenges to integrating street
vendors into public spaces. First is the allocation of vending spaces by city
authorities in the context of the renovation of the city centre; the second,
more theoretical, challenge is the alienation of the 'public' nature of space,
especially when it is dominated by powerful groups of vendors who rent
out or sell valuable vending spots to other vendors. I use the renovation
of Bhadra Plaza in Ahmedabad, India as a case study to demonstrate how
street vending may evolve and alter the values of space over time.

    To develop this argument, I use Henri Lefebvre's concepts of the right
to the city and the production of space (1968; 1974). When applied to street
vending, the right to the city approach highlights who is able to make
decisions on the uses of a public space, which role is played by each of the
actors, and how the interplay of power and interests shapes the physical

and social form of space (Mitchell 2003). Street vendors occupy public spaces but, are usually not considered a group that has a right to decide about the city and or to receive allocated spaces in public areas. However, they take an informal place in the city-making process and are able to deter authorities' decisions and instead enforce their own codes according to their commercial interests. Moreover, they are able to arrange space to enhance the attractiveness of the market areas; thus, street vendors do participate in the organization of the cities.

Following Lefebvre's theoretical framework, this paper explores two interrelated concerns. First, the conflicts that are generated between the exchange value and the use value of a public space. Exchange value of space emerges when it is appropriated and altered to fit the business purposes of the street vendors.[1] Vending space is valuable for street vendors, as it is essential for running their business. In prime locations, where potential clients are abundant, space can be sold or rented out by the vendor who originally appropriated that space; this is a widespread practice in certain locations. The exploitation of space for commercial purposes requires an individual or group to gain control over that space—a process that creates tensions and open conflicts between local groups and authorities. The use value of a space, such as children playing on the streets or spontaneous gatherings between locals, is excluded or marginalized from spaces dominated by powerful groups of street vendors.

Second, I describe the mechanisms that allow specific groups of street vendors to build their capacity to appropriate and codify space. I look at this process in the context of the renovation of the Bhadra Plaza. Space appropriation by street vendors takes place through informal arrangements and customary codes. This occurs as streets and open spaces tend to be places that can be appropriated spontaneously which is part of the way they work on a daily basis, especially in the Global South. However, the absence of frameworks to establish the ways space is appropriated becomes problematic as the activity expands.

The case is interesting as India is one of the first countries to recognize the positive contribution of street vending by enacting the Street Vendors Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending Act nationwide (Ministry of Law and Justice 2014). This law forces Indian cities to develop a strategy for integrating vendors into the city planning process in two specific

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1   Exchange value and use value are concepts developed in Marxist theory applied to raw materials and labour used as means of production. H. Lefebvre applied these concepts to urban space and its making process (Lefebvre 1974).

ways. First, cities must recognize street vendors' right to participate in the decision-making process through the creation of Town Vending Committees, which include different stakeholders, experts, city authorities, and street vendors' representatives. Second, cities are called upon to allocate specific areas to street vendors so that they can carry out their activities without being harassed. Authorities identify street vendors and grant them a license that allows them and their family members to sell in a specific area, which was based on guidelines developed in 2009 (AMC 2010). The main objective of this policy is recognizing street vending as part of the current functioning of Indian cities and its role in poverty alleviation (Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation 2013). This law recognises the importance of protecting vulnerable street vendors from evictions in principle. However, the law overlooks the power relations between different groups of street vendors at the local level and the value that vending spots acquire, especially in prime locations.

This chapter is based on six months of field research in Ahmedabad, in which I studied street vendors' integration into Bhadra Plaza after its renovation in 2013, a project in the heart of Ahmedabad's city centre. I used mapping and in-depth interviews with key community members and authorities as research methods. The case demonstrates a spectrum of power among street vendors' groups and how the more powerful ones dominated the reorganization and valuation of the plaza despite the will of the authorities to get control of the allocation of spaces.

2   The Right to the City as a Theoretical Approach

One of Henri Lefebvre's major contributions to urban theory was the explanation of how political and economic processes relate to the dynamics of space (Lefebvre 1968; 1974). As a result of the interplay of forces, dominant groups can codify space to fit their specific interests. In my research, this was evident in how powerful groups of street vendors dominated the uses of a public space and changed it into a kind of commodity, an object used for individual commercial purposes. In fact, Lefebvre proposed that modern societies tend to make of urban spaces a commodity that serves capitalistic purposes, by doing so, they enter into contradiction with their original use value. For example, social housing units are produced, as any other market items, to be sold rather than to create adequate social environments for the inhabitants. The case of city centres is similar, they are not new urban settings but they are appropriated and changed to

promote a culture of consumption (Lefebvre 1968). A culture of consumption refers to buying goods, food and similar services in space but also to the symbolic consumption of the spaces themselves. In the capitalistic societies a branded bag, to give an example, is not bought only to carry things, which is its original use value, but rather, as it might become a sign of social status, the bag is consumed symbolically in this way. From Lefebvre's perspective, a similar process occurs with urban spaces, they are created or appropriated not to become social environments, its original use value, but to become objects used for commercial, capitalistic purposes (Lefebvre 1991).

The use value of a public space is expressed through the diversity of ways it is appropriated by different groups creating a social environment. Streets, for example, are made for transit and gathering, for children to play in, and for social interaction. Commercial uses and street vending might be part of the diversity of uses of public spaces. As suggested by Lefebvre, the change towards a different set of values is unveiled when spaces are appropriated by a few dominant groups preventing others to use them, they become subordinated spaces. In the case of street vending, selling spots in the streets and open spaces become valuable assets as the street markets gain recognition and attractiveness, and thus tend to be appropriated to make a business out of them, preventing other non-commercial uses of space.

I use Lefebvre's concept of 'space codification', which refers to the codes that regulate space and define the uses of the place: who can use it and for what purposes (Lefebvre 1974). In some cultures, these codes are established by legal frameworks and authorities, while in others they emerge from daily negotiations among users of the space or are framed by customary practices. Examining vendors' appropriation of the streets also requires an examination into the codification of the space.

Diversity of use is an indication of the balance between the use value and exchange value of a space. For example, a square called Manek Chowk in Old Ahmedabad City is used for diverse functions throughout the day. In the morning, it is used to feed cows; in the afternoon, it is a parking area; at night, it becomes an attractive street-food area visited by locals from different social classes and from different city areas. Street vendors in Manek Chowk play a role in creating a hub of social interaction, a meaningful place for the citizens, in co-existence with a multiplicity of other social and commercial activities. In this case, a balance of values is reflected in the fact that the Chowk is not dominated exclusively by the street vendors' group.

A clear expression of the street vendors' domination of streets is when vending spots are illegally rented out or sold by more powerful groups to street vendors in the area. Street space rentals show how a vending place (i.e., space) can become a very tangible asset, associated with a monetary value and, depending on demand and supply, generating an economy of street space.[2] In these cases, the commercialization of vending spots, related directly to the exchange value of space, contradicts the other non-commercial uses, generating conflicts among different social groups. The Bhadra Plaza case is no exception. The recent renovation has changed the characteristics of the place rendering it more attractive for commercial purposes, a business opportunity that street vendors did not easily let go.

I used Lefebvre's above mentioned ideas to examine two aspects of the Bhadra Plaza case: on one hand the plaza renovation process led by city authorities; and on the other hand, the capacity of powerful groups of street vendors to appropriate space and enforce informal codes to set the organization of the street vendors in the plaza.

3   The Bhadra Plaza Case

The case of Bhadra Plaza provides an example of how a city planning failure can be used by local groups to extend market's activities. Bhadra Plaza is located in the heart of the Old City, a symbolic place for citizens as it is strongly attached to the origin, history, and identity of Ahmedabad. Before the renovation project, the plaza had around 900 vendors; after the renovation finished in 2014, the number of street vendors had doubled—far beyond the expectations of the city authorities and plans. Before the renovation, the Old City commercial area had approximately 5500 street vendors: 3500 between Bhadra Fort and Teen Darwaja, and 2000 towards Manek Chowk in 2013 (Centre for Urban Equity 2014).[3] Now, Bhadra Plaza is one of the city's prime vending locations and is dominated by market activities. To sell in Bhadra, vendors pay INR 200 (3 USD) per day to local leaders; in nearby streets and other city areas, they pay INR 50 (0.74 USD).

2   I explored in-depth the domination of streets and open spaces by street vendors in the Tepito case in Mexico City (Oriard 2015). In this case the market area had expanded and deeply transformed the low income neighbourhood into a globally connected market place of around 12,000 street stalls dominating the economy of the place, and exploited by the local families.
3   The Bhadra-Manek Chowk market area sells a wide diversity of goods in specialized commercial streets. The specialized market areas include: a shoes street, a sari street, a book area, a cloth market, a second-hand clothes market, a cooking utensils area, and an eateries area.

The case study also shows that street vendors have a good understanding of space and how to arrange it to maximize their businesses. They use strategies such as occupying corners to expand their market facade, creating pathways, displaying their goods in vertical structures to make them more visible, and creating specialized business line hubs to create a commercial identity. By doing so, street vendors are able to transform the plaza into a highly organized marketplace. However, the expansion of street vending generates problems with other social groups that are excluded from the place. Nearby apartments have been transformed into storage places; residents complain about noise and difficulties with access to their house entrances. Local shops have become more specialized with a focus on external visitors, with a reduction in the number of general stores for residents. People looking for a place to sit and relax find only residual market spaces with limited views of the plaza. Street vending maximizes the commercial value of the plaza but disincentivizes other uses.

Most of the population welcomed the plaza's renovation project. One of the reasons for this public support was the lack of well-designed public spaces in the city. Interviews I conducted when the plaza opened discovered people's appreciation of the city's provision of space for them to rest, sit, and admire a beautiful setting: the Old City. Some interviewees explained that before the renovation they had no space to take a break because the whole space had been used intensively for market activities, parking, and the movement of cars.[4] In fact, in the nineteenth century, the plaza had been converted into a road intersection connecting the city's two main bridges (Nehru Bridge and Ellis Bridge) with two main roads (Gandhi Road and Relief Road) (see Figure 10.3 (a)).

The area's easy access by cars and two-wheel vehicles was an important condition for increase in the commercial activities along the roads. Figure 10.2 shows the organization of street vending along the roads and the Bhadra Kali Temple. Different elements such as traffic, parking hubs, numerous clients visiting the place, temples, and public buildings, just to name a few have played a role in creating the perfect conditions for commercial activities to expand, see Figure 10.2 (b). All of these elements formed an ecosystem in the area; traffic and congestion are favourable conditions for street vending.

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4   Five people were interviewed in the plaza. Most were happy with the result; they told me about the activities they usually do in the plaza. Most of them came to sit, chat, rest, and observe, while others came to purchase goods. Interviews were held on the 21 February 2014, when the plaza was partially opened after the renovation.

Figure 10.2   Organization of street vending in the plaza before the renovation
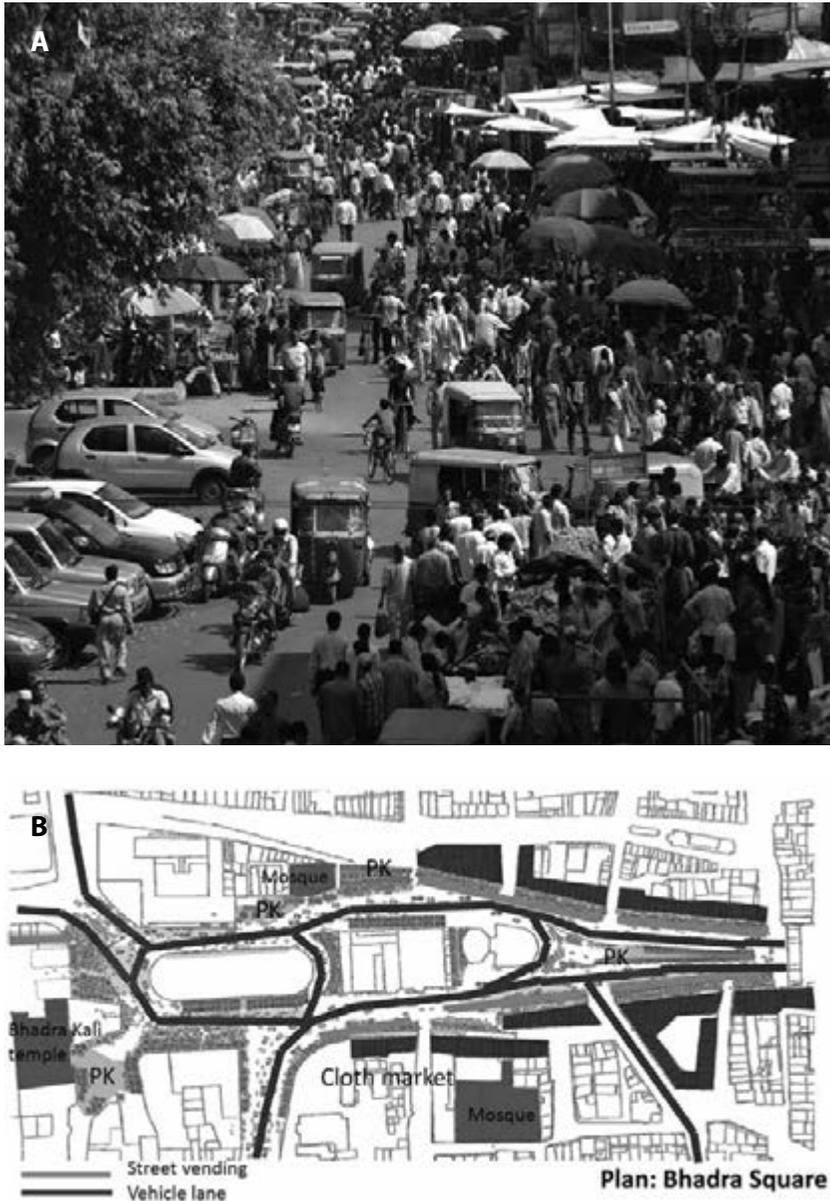
Source: Rocio Conesa 2011 (a) and Lila Oriard (b)[5]

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5   Special acknowledgments are given to CEPT University students who shared the background images of the area used to do the maps in Figure 10.2 (b) and Figure 10.3 (a and b).

Figure 10.3   Bhadra Plaza transformed into a pedestrian area
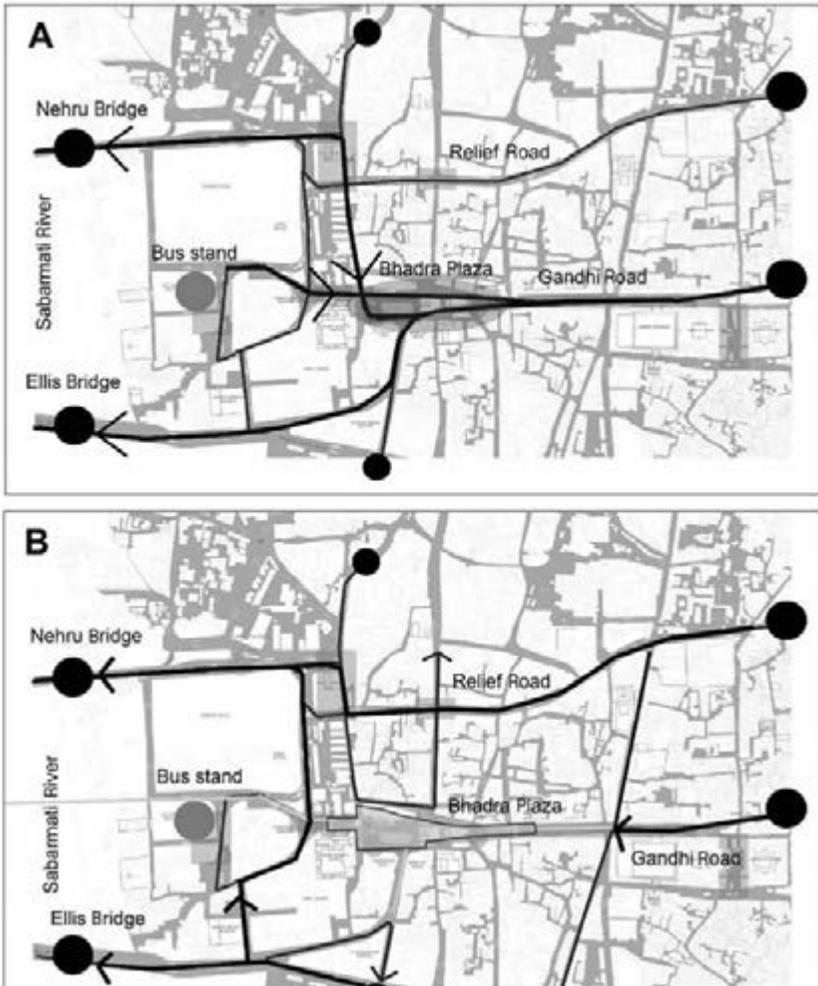
Source: Lila Oriard 2013 (a) and (b)

Bhadra Plaza's renovation was done by the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation (AMC) with the intention of 'giv[ing] the place back to the city' as an accessible space for all to walk, sit, and enjoy the place by creating an area for pedestrians.[6] Figure 10.3 (a) and (b) shows Bhadra Plaza's conversion into a pedestrian area, a radical change made by the reorganization of vehicle

6   The project's information was sourced from in-depth interview with the private-sector architect in charge of the plaza's design and execution; the same information was confirmed by

traffic in the area before and after the renovation, and which also changed the conditions for street vending.

The Bhadra Plaza redevelopment project intended to highlight the value of the historical area. In fact, for at least the past decade the AMC's Heritage Department has been trying to obtain a UNESCO World Heritage Site nomination for the Old City, which was obtained in 2017. Ahmedabad is the only Indian city included in the heritage list.[7] The plaza's renovation would have enhanced the aesthetic value of a core area surrounded by historical monuments. Two officials whom I interviewed[8] mentioned that the project was inspired by the renovation of European historical centres and public spaces. However, the Bhadra historical area was not a post-industrial area, as is the case of historical cities in Europe. On the contrary, the area already hosted one of the most vibrant, informal, and historical markets in the city.

The cloth market, for example, located at the south end of the plaza, had been around since the city was founded and had been part of the city's entrepreneurial spirit and history. When the cotton mills closed in the 1980s many people lost their employment, and during this crisis period, the market started expanding and shifted from selling raw materials (fabrics) to distributing manufactured garments. After the violent riots between Hindu and Muslim communities in 2002,[9] the clothes market welcomed many vendors with Muslim origins, who encountered difficulties in finding job opportunities in other parts of the city (Breman 2004, 132). Since then, street vending has generated employment opportunities for local families and minorities, which can be considered its important contribution to the city. This market, although part of the plaza and its vending dynamics, was ignored in the renovation project's design.

AMC officials. The Bhadra project was co-financed by the JNNURM (Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission) National programme and to a lesser degree by the city (AMC).

7   The historic centre of Ahmedabad has a unique organization of space based on community units called pols; this feature merited consideration for the UNESCO nomination. The old city resembles a labyrinth connecting one pol to another. The community system in the old city has almost disappeared due to changes in the society and the introduction of 'modern' lifestyles. Local families, especially the middle- and upper-income groups, tend to move to other parts of the city looking for more comfort. Important efforts have been made to restore some traditional wooden houses and to create some heritage promenades for tourists.

8   The interview was conducted on 15 February 2014 at the AMC offices with Mr. P.V.K. Nair DGM (Deputy General Manager), Heritage Department, and his assistant.

9   In 2002, a train with Hindu pilgrims was set on fire, presumably on purpose. It is unclear how this occurred and who did it, but Muslims were massively condemned for this atrocity. Hindu citizens went out and killed many Muslims, who reacted with the same violence. The Ahmedabad city government remained silent for two days before protecting the Muslim population; this behaviour by the government was widely questioned.

Figure 10.4   Expansion of the Bhadra Plaza street market

Source: Rocio Conesa 2014

The new design for the plaza involved creating a large, open perspective from the Bhadra Fort to Teen Darwaja. Two buildings were demolished to clear the area, and an existing group of trees that used to be in an enclosed green were integrated into the plaza. The design featured amenities such as a fountain in the middle of the plaza and a sitting area under the shade of trees. Spaces on the edges of the plaza were allocated for street vendors. However, the design of the plaza overlooked the vendors' commercial needs and their interests in vending space.

The AMC allocated 600 vending spaces for existing vendors in the renovated plaza, but this process was never enforced because the local vendors considered it unfair. The architects and city planners had planned for the post-renovation vendor spaces to be in the same exact locations as vendors had occupied before, but did not consider that the new condition of the

plaza would lead to new street market configurations. According to the project manager, there were around 900 street vendors in the area before the renovation.[10] In the months following the completion of the plaza, the number of street vendors increased rapidly; in 2015, a year after the opening of the plaza, there were a total of 1200 street vendors illegally using most of the pedestrian-designated areas for market activities. The designers had overlooked the business opportunity that space represents for street vendors to create new businesses and expand their present ones. The renovation of the plaza increased the quality of public space which in turn increased the demand for vending spaces in the area. The form of the plaza changed as two buildings at the centre of the area were demolished to enlarge public space and clear the view to create a direct perspective from the Bhadra Fort to Teen Darwaja monument. The design of the plaza was pedestrian friendly, the use of natural materials such as granite enhanced the quality of space. As the demand for vending spots increased, many vendors were willing to pay a higher daily amount to run their businesses in the plaza. Paradoxically, the plaza's design created an economy of vending spaces, causing the street market to expand. Figure 10.4 shows the new distribution of the market's activities in the plaza as of 2014.The vendors now occupy the public plaza entirely, extending the market into the areas that were planned for pedestrians and changing distribution patterns according to pedestrian flows in the plaza. Consequently, a public plaza designed for a diversity of (especially leisure) activities was converted into a marketplace—a result different from what was expected in the original design.

3.1   Difficulties allocating spaces for the street vendors

After the completion of the plaza, the AMC was unable to implement the allocation of vending space. The planning tools concerning street vending at city level were limited and presented serious implementation problems, especially in contested locations like Bhadra Plaza (AMC 2010). Some organized groups of vendors mobilized in February 2014 asking for recognition from the city authorities and allocation of vending spaces for all the members of the organizations within the plaza, following the national Street Vendors Act that was finally approved some weeks before the demonstrations took place.

10   An interview was conducted with Mr. U. Sharma, Director of the CEPT Research and Development Foundation at CEPT University in March 2013. He was in charge of the Bhadra Plaza project, and his team kindly provided information about the on-going project.

In this process, two important space codes were neglected. First, vending space is highly important for vendors. As their businesses depend on access to the streets and other public spaces, relocation would seriously impact their livelihoods. Some vendors had regular clients who came to their stalls; others had formed complementary commercial hubs by associating business lines with areas of stalls (shoes, clothes, socks, and accessories, for example). For this reason, one of the main concerns of the street vendors was to have specific areas assigned to them, individually, and should appear as such in the plan. The authorities reacted with silence and ambiguity to this specific demand. City authorities could not designate an area of public space with a name as if it was a private property, but some mechanisms to secure the vendors' assets could have been taken into account.

Second, the AMC overlooked the organizational capacities of some vendor groups and their ability to establish political networks, especially the Muslim groups that felt particularly vulnerable in this situation. After the 2002 riots, there are continued tensions between the different ethnic groups in Ahmedabad. AMC's passivity and silence regarding space allocation during the construction phase also created tensions between different vendor groups. The Bhadra historical area includes a range of local communities, many of Muslim origin. In this case, Muslim groups have shown an important capacity for organizing, mobilizing, and appropriating the plaza as a reaction to the threat of eviction. This shows how distrust of and marginalization in the planning process can trigger the development of communities' capabilities.

An in-depth interview with leaders of the Self-Labour Organization (SLO), an association that was created in 2013 from a previous organization,[11] revealed how the AMC did the survey to define which vendors had the right to a place in the plaza. According to them, two people from the AMC went to the plaza to do a survey in 2011, before the new plaza layout was designed. They had a computer and used a few different locations to interview street vendors individually and register them in a database. The vendors claimed that the surveyors had never conveyed that this was the official AMC survey, nor did they mention how critical it was for the vendors to register in order to get space allocations some years later. Furthermore, other institutions,

11   The interview was held at the office of the Self-Labour Organization (SLO) behind Bhadra Plaza on 12th January 2015. The Gujarati-English translation was done by the street vendors themselves. It is worth mention that as a female, foreign researcher it was easier to obtain sensitive political information by myself, rather than in the presence of local researchers. Two of the leaders were there during the interview, and a small group of street vendors gathered around us and shared a few comments.

including the architects in charge of the design, some students, and some researchers, were conducting surveys at the same time. Consequently, street vendors were confused and did not know which survey was the official one. This created a lot of confusion and a feeling of distrust in the AMC procedure. One street vendor who got official registration after the plaza renovation, explained that he used to be a mobile vendor. On one fine day while passing by the plaza he registered with the AMC by chance and eventually managed to secure a place to sell in Bhadra Plaza. He said he felt very lucky and happy, and afterwards he had joined the SLO to help other vendors, especially those who were not registered officially by AMC and had been selling in that area before.

In fact, many Muslim vendors who had long occupied spaces in the plaza were not recognized by the AMC survey, despite strong evidence of their occupation. This was the case for vendors who used to have places behind the Fort, near the Lal Darwaja bus stop. This group had been selling backpacks and luggage items, and they had confiscation receipts issued by the police when they had been evicted previously. In the receipts individual names appeared, effectively demonstrating that they had been vendors in the plaza at the time. Indeed, the length of time that a vendor had occupied space for business is a very important factor for legitimating his or her appropriation of the space. Even with this strong evidence, the AMC did not include this group in the official survey, resulting in a lack of allocated space for them. However, they were still using their spaces as before, and other local groups considered them legitimate users based on familiarity.

The street vendors were removed from the area during the construction of the plaza between 2013 and 2014. The authorities did not offer the vendors an alternative solution for keeping their businesses in operation during this time. They were allowed, however, to discreetly occupy other streets in the nearby area if they were able to find a place on their own. The vendors used their social networks to find places to sell and displayed a capacity for finding temporary solutions. Some found vending places near the mosque or in front of their relatives' houses. It is customary for a shop front to be considered an extension of the shop or residence; in some cases, street vendors ask permission to use these spaces or directly rent them from the so-called owners.

The vending space-related confusion and speculation during the plaza's renovation attracted new street vendors to the area. In December 2014, street vendors asked the AMC to accommodate 2000 vendors in the completed plaza (*Times of India* 2014). A letter send to the Municipal Commissioner, shown to me during an interview in January 2015, states the following: 'The

municipal officials have removed 887 self-employed vendors of the 1500 vendors in the area without providing us with an alternative place to carry out our vending activities, violating thus the Honourable Supreme Court guidelines and provision set forth in the Vendors' Policy by depriving us from our livelihood'. A verification process was carried out by the AMC after the completion of the plaza to identify the local street vendors who were to be allocated a place in the plaza, based on the 2011 survey. However, many registered vendors were excluded because their fingerprints or position in the plaza did not correspond to the previous survey. After the verification process, the AMC identified approximately 700 street traders to be allocated space in the plaza, although the previous survey by the plaza designer office had listed 900 vendors.

This process was contested by the local street traders, causing political pressure to keep the vendors in the plaza. The vendors described how the AMC had quickly held a drawing to allocate the spaces to the street vendors and relieve political pressure. However, the allocation based on this drawing was eventually not enforced. This situation shows the difficulties for authorities to deal with the allocation of limited spaces in the context of growing demand for vending space. 'The vendors complained because the drawing was conducted when most original vendors were not at the location. The vendors alleged that nearly 75% of the vendors who figured on the list were outsiders' (*Times of India* 2014).

The AMC's management of this situation created confusion and the fear of eviction among the street vendors. As a result, Muslim groups organized demonstrations to contest the registration process and ask for transparency from the city authorities. They brought together unregistered vendors, who were claiming that they have been vending in the area before the renovation with those who were lucky to coincidentally get the registration. Vendors mobilized politically, simultaneously increasing their numbers and extending the limits of the market area. The AMC was unable to distribute space as per the plaza's original design, and the lack of clarity in the process of registration of the vendors resulted in discontent. Some vending places were considered in the design of the plaza, without taking into account to whom, individuals or groups, they will be allocated. The plaza design was not followed by a process that takes into account the street vendors' situation, needs and socio-spatial dynamics, it also lacked political agreements with local groups on how to do the allocation of spaces from a participatory, democratic perspective. Street vendors were considered in the plaza design plans but not as officially recognised actors of the city making process.

3.2   Groups' Resistance and Appropriation Strategies

The street vendors I interviewed in the plaza agreed that the area should accommodate as many vendors as possible, as it is a very good place for vending activities. This reflected street vendors' interests and representation of space. The AMC had a very different idea: the plaza would be a public space for the city that highlights the beauty of the monuments. Although a garden was integrated into the original design, after the plaza's completion this space degraded rapidly and was eventually converted into a two-wheeler parking area for market customers. This shows how the representations and practices of space contribute to the production of spaces, in this case transforming a garden into a parking area.

Among the many groups in Bhadra Plaza, I worked with two groups: the Self-Labour Organization (SLO) and the Self-Employed Women Association (SEWA). Both organizations are different, and both have very strong ethnic characters: SLO incorporated mostly Muslim men, while the SEWA street vendors in Bhadra were mostly Hindu.

SEWA is a powerful non-governmental organization (NGO) with almost two million members across India.[12] It is part of the National Alliance of Street Vendors in India (NASVI), and it is an internationally known organization. SEWA was established in 1972, when some women vendors were evicted from the Manek Chowk vegetable market area in Ahmedabad Old City and afterwards fought for recognition. For the past four decades, SEWA has been fighting for the legal rights of street vendors, especially women vendors. SEWA has won important cases at the High Supreme Court. In fact, it was after they won a case in 2009 that the Indian Government recognized the importance of integrating street vendors into the city, which eventually led to the issuance of the Street Vendors Act in 2014.

As in many countries of the Global South, in India planning tools are frequently inoperative at the local level because codes and rules that regulate street practices are constructed through the practice of customary codes or negotiated in informal arrangements with local leaders. This way of producing space creates an important gap between legislation and what actually happens at ground level. This is evident in the case of Bhadra; for example, a fruit stall owner who had been vending for ten years outside Bhadra Plaza was registered by the AMC and assigned a place inside the plaza, as per the drawing. However, after the new assignment of places, the local organizations did not allow him to occupy his new place, as it was located at the intersection of two paths

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12   To view the website, visit: www.sewa.org.

that had previously been occupied by the clothes market vendors. This was a valuable spot that was already occupied by local leaders, who rented out the street spaces in front of their shop. The street vendors' law is supposed to protect more vulnerable vendors such as this fruit vendor, but in this case it is protecting the businesses of powerful local leaders. The local people did not recognize the fairness of the drawing and established their own codes based on how previous organizations had operated. The fruit vendor kept selling at his usual place outside the plaza's gate. Hence, the actual allocation of the vending spaces took place outside of the formal planning process and was enforced by power relations, namely local powerful leaders.

SEWA vendors got official recognition by the authorities almost without problems. During an interview in a slum in Navrangpura where some vendors live,[13] the SEWA members said that they were not interested in obtaining a license or official recognition; they only wanted to have vending space. SEWA has political power and could secure this access, so the vendors could rely on the NGO to do the negotiations for them. There were no mobilizations of SEWA members, as they did not claim their rights by themselves without SEWA's mediation. Indeed, SEWA membership provided some level of protection for the vendors. One vendor woman who was interviewed showed some documents that proved she had been a SEWA member for a long time.[14] The documents served as evidence that she had been selling in the plaza before and legitimized her appropriation of space. This confirms that customary codes are very relevant in the appropriation and codification of the plaza.

SEWA vendors did, however, face conflicts with Muslim groups. Most of the women vendors keep selling, but some have lost their privileged positions. For example, one vendor was displaced from the Bhadra Kali temple to a different location in front of the Zila Panchyat Bhawan—an effect of 'muscle power', as she described it. A fruit vendor in the area who was not involved in local conflicts said that the SEWA members sometimes increased their numbers by inviting family members to join, which increases the number of street vendors in the area. Vendors from other groups complained about this as vending spaces are limited and highly contested.[15] Local groups of

13   The interview was conducted on 7th January 2015 with a group of local street vendors in Navrangpura, the settlement is known as 'Hollywood'. The translation from Gujarati was done by the research assistant.
14   This vendor woman was reluctant to talk to us and decided to call other traders and family members so she would feel more comfortable. It was clear that they were reluctant to talk and were worried about misinforming others.
15   The interview was conducted on 2 January 2015 in Bhadra Plaza, translation from Gujarati was done by the research assistant.

street vendors were competing among themselves to get as much space as possible, as space was a valuable resource for all of them. Power relations were important in understanding who was getting the better places and for which purpose.

SEWA vendors seemed to keep using the same spaces and did not extend their vending spaces to the plaza central areas. However, some variations were identified. For example, one vendor I interviewed rented out four stalls selling women's accessories near the Bhadra Kali temple area, as well as a storage location in a building; to have control on the area, he run a small stall but his family business was to rent out space to other vendors. This information was verified in a second interview.[16] The family appropriation of vending spaces for rentals was prevalent among other groups as well. The mother of this interviewee had gotten the stalls because she belonged to SEWA and she had kept them for the same reason; and yet, she rarely goes to the stalls because of her advanced age. Her sons continue the businesses. The ways street vending evolves and how space was inherited by family members merit consideration. As mentioned before, changing from vendors to space lenders is a common move, especially in valuable locations; this quickly spreading practice promotes public space to become a commodity, an exchange value, that benefits individuals and families but prevents others to use space. In fact, local leaders tend to get control of spaces just to rent them out—thereby contributing to the alienation of the nature of the public space as a community asset.

SLO had a different political strategy to carry out the appropriation of space: they relied on political relations.[17] The clothes market street vendors were one of the most powerful groups, and used to have their own organization before the founding of SLO. Historically, Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) from the Congress Party had given their support to these community leaders; currently, three MLAs from the Congress Party support the street vendors. Since 2012, a new MLA from the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has also provided partial support to the vendors in Bhadra.

In an interview, SLO leaders stated that they were able to secure access to space through political connections. These connections were visually

16   The interview was conducted on 19 February 2014 in Bhadra Plaza, translation from Gujarati was done by a CEPT Faculty member.
17   The interview was conducted on 6th January 2014 in the SLO office with the leaders; a second interview on the 8th January in Bhadra Plaza was done with a local leader. I first got in contact with him in 2014 during my first interviews and keep in touch with him to verify information, as he spoke openly and gave precise information. The translation from Gujarati was done by the research assistant.

displayed in the area through images of political leaders from both the Congress Party and the BJP. One of the shop owners in the clothes market had been able to secure fifty vending places in Bhadra for his people (i.e., street vendors under his protection), to whom he rented out the spaces. This person, who was highly respected in the area, owned ten formal shops and was a local community leader. After the plaza's renovation, he continued to rent out the same places, so the distribution of space was maintained. Street vendors considered this situation legitimate because they were using the same places that they had occupied before. This practice represented control over resources (i.e. vending spaces) by local leaders.

> One of the most important leaders is H.bhai. He has 10 formal shops in the area; 50 of his people (street vendors under his protection) got space in the Bhadra Plaza. He earns around 10 000 Rs per day (100£). He has good connections with politicians. He is an old leader in the area, an umbrella guy. Y.bhai has 5 stalls, Ib.bhai has 7 stalls, but they didn't get a place in the plaza. (notes taken during the interview, names are changed to ensure privacy of informant, 2014)

SLO interviewees[18] explained that their main problem was the new leaders who had no connections to the local community but had powerful political connections that supported their appropriation of street spaces. More information about the new leaders was not available; however, during several interviews, it was confirmed that the number of vendors had increased considerably. Organizations that relied on political relations, such as SLO, sought to increase the number of their members, as their power of negotiation was related to the number of street vendors in the organization. Interviewees from SLO said that street vendors felt used by the political parties, who offered their support in obtaining spaces in exchange for political support, a phenomenon that exists not only in India, but in other countries as Mexico as shown by Cross (1988).

SEWA and SLO both ensured their members' access to space, but through different means. SEWA members relied on this NGO to defend their selling places. Most of the vendors from this group were able to keep their places, and only a few displacements were confirmed. In contrast, SLO relies on the political connections of local leaders. Their fear about being displaced played a major role in motivating the vendors to organize and mobilize. Because of their organizational capacity, SLO members appropriated important

18   Interview conducted on the 6th January 2014 in the SLO offices.

areas in the plaza, expanded market activities, ensured control of space, and established new codes regulating access to vending spaces that were enforced by powerful local leaders.

The Bhadra Plaza case shows that the AMC had little control of the groups that were appropriating public space for commercial uses and the market activities in the plaza. This gap was used by local powerful groups to transform the intended public plaza into a street market area. This happened for at least three reasons: first, the architects' plan was inspired by European designs for public space that had little to do with the Indian context; second, the plan did not consider the street vendors' interests, especially their attachment to space as a valuable resource for running their businesses; third, the survey of original vendors was done in a way that generated feelings of distrust and fear of eviction, which motivated the vendors to mobilize and protect their interests. The street vendors showed great capacity to mobilize and secure their most important asset: vending spaces. The domination of market activities in the plaza alters the value of the space, as its becomes a business asset for the benefit of specific interest groups.

4   Conclusions

The right to the city was used by the street vendors in Bhadra Plaza to claim their right to vending spaces after the renovation of the place, as per India's recent enaction of a law protecting street vendors. In fact, this concept is widely used to point out that marginalized groups are excluded from city planning and design processes. However, the theoretical concept of the right to the city does not intend to defend the interests of specific groups, but instead looks at the qualities (and values) of space from a wider perspective. The street vendors certainly have the right to take part in the city-making process and to have their interests expressed in the physical form of space—just as much as the other actors who express different views and uses of space. Indeed, when street vendors dominate a public space to get individual profits from its commercial exploitation, preventing other uses, their attempt to obtain the right to the city alters the quality of space as a collective construct characterized by its diversity of use values.

An interesting lesson from the Bhadra Plaza case is that the way the AMC managed the process of identifying vendors and allocating space produced fears of eviction, which in turn played an important role in

motivating street vendors, especially Muslim groups, to mobilize to keep their places in the plaza. This shows that the value of space in the plaza for street vending was becoming more valuable as it became more suitable for running profitable businesses. Vulnerable vendors were protected by powerful groups and leaders mobilized to protect their own interests. After the opening of the plaza and the official allocation of spaces, the street vendors reorganized according to the groups who have appropriated certain territories. This was true in the case of the fruit vendor who was displaced from his officially allocated vending space, which was controlled by the clothes market leaders.

The Street Vendors Act was used by powerful groups and organizations to defend their interests and those of the market, but it was not useful for empowering vulnerable vendors directly. Women vendors, for example, are still struggling to keep their spaces against the 'muscle power' of other groups. This situation highlights a limitation of the law at the ground level. Marginalized vendors are still dependent on powerful structures and leaders; some are displaced, and some continue to be harassed. This situation unveils a deep disconnection between the law and the complex reality taking place on the ground.

The right to the city approach is useful for identifying some of the limitations in the implementation of the street vendors' protection law at the local level. The municipal corporation lacked reliable information on the different groups operating in the plaza, their relations of power, and their capacity to mobilize. When the allocation of spaces was contested, the AMC faced difficulties in proposing an alternative and re-taking control of the process. In spatial terms, the municipal corporation did not expect that the renovation of the plaza would create a demand for street vending space due to its commercial value. The result is that the design for a public plaza resulted in a dysfunctional marketplace where gardens are used as parking spaces, some pedestrian spaces are used by the vendors' vehicles or their clients, and the planned view of the Teen Darwaja is completely blocked by street stalls.

This emerging arrangement of the uses of this plaza is the result of a complex process of the production of space, including its recodification. When the street vendors were able to appropriate and give a commercial form to spaces through informal practices and establish their own rules through the exercise of power, the qualities of the public space changed. Now the use of the space is clearly unbalanced and many other actors, such as the plaza's visitors, are clearly excluded.

Acknowledgements

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About the author

Lila Oriard Colin did her Ph.D. at the Development Planning Unit (DPU), University College London (2015). Her thesis concerned street trading and its ability to produce space in Tepito, a neighbourhood in downtown Mexico City; in this work, she argues that street trading changes the public spaces it occupies, which then become valuable commercial assets. Lila is an architect with two master's degrees in urban planning. She has several years of experience as an urban planner in France. In 2013-2014 she was a research associate at the DPU Urban Knowledge Network Asia hosted by the Centre for Environmental Planning and Technology in Ahmedabad, India. Recent publications include *The right to the city, learning from the Tepito experience* (2013); *Contra la ciudad museo: el papel del comercio callejero para la conservación de los barrios tradicionales* (2011); and *Conservation in Developing Countries: Patan World Heritage Site in the UNESCO List in Danger* (2006, co-authored).