



Street vending and the States: a review of the 21st- century literature

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Abstract

The current urban research and policy discourse is concerned with the expansion of the informality over the urban public space, among all types of informality the street vending informality is the most visible one. Since the state is considered an important stakeholder in managing different forms of public space occupancy, the nature of the relation between the state and the street vending informality has been widely scrutinised by many scholars across countries. This article reviews the 21st-century literature on the street vending phenomenon and the role of the state in managing it. The nature of state's role in managing the street vending informality is categorized into three groups i.e., the repressive state, the state with an ambiguous role and the state playing a supportive role for the street vendors. Throughout this article, an attempt has been made to better understand the changing dynamics of both the global and local narrative of street vending management and public space politics.

Introduction

The street vending phenomenon is the most dominant sector in the informal economy and is a common feature of almost all developing and underdeveloped countries. There are diverse types of informality at the state or city level, but street vending is the most concerning form of informality which is in the planning domain of the developing countries for more than three decades in the southern and south-eastern states. In the 1980s there were different explanations for the origin and expansion of the street vending practices, many are in the belief that the scarcity of the suitable job opportunities for the rising number of people (Hart, 1973). In many countries, the 1990s economic crisis was highlighted as the best explanation for the emergence of the street vending phenomenon (Maneepong & Walsh, 2013). but many people have cited the easy entry into small entrepreneurship as the main cause for the widespread popularity of the street vending practices as a livelihood option for the marginal poor and the migrants in the city who are in search of employment opportunities.

Why street vending falls mainly in the informal sector of economic activity, is a debated question across many fields of research, ranging from economics and policy research to anthropology. The majority of definitions of the street vending agreed on the following three aspects, (1) those public space street traders whose businesses are not registered or the local authority doesn't provide them and legal permission, (2) sell products without any permanent structure of shop or stall, portable carts are the preferred means of vending, (3) they don't have and social or financial security from the state or government. That means, their activity is voluntary and out of government security (Bhowmik, 2010).

The discussion over street vending research is a part of the global debate about the production, expansion and treatment of informality all over the world. Thus, when we talk about street vending, we also need to contemplate on the nature of discussion going around regarding informality. From the 1990s onward a group of scholars mostly working on the nature of the southern urban practices claimed that the "State" or "Government" can be the main regulating force to determine which form of activities shall be considered formal and which group of activities to be designated as informal (Mcfarlane, 2010; Roy, A and AISayyad, 2004). Since such an intervention in global informality research has created a new mode of understanding of informality, many empirical works from across the different corners of the world consolidated such a claim. In this article, a subtle review has been given considering the literature where states are depicted in the treatment and regulation of street vending activity.

Approaches to studying informal employment: A comprehensive understanding of street vending

Informal employment is conceived as those employments where the mode of activity is legal but that are not covered under any regulatory body whether it is the State or any non-state authority. There are two dominant types of informal employment, one is informal-wage employment and the other is informal-self-employment. Street vending as a form of informal employment can be seen through the following four approaches-

Dualist approach

The origin of the dualist perspective can be traced back to the 1970s when the developing countries were facing huge unemployment because of the uncontrolled and unprecedented population growth and a large amount of immigration to the few big cities has accelerated the unemployment in the big city centres too (Biles, 2008). The disparity created through the disproportion of the demographic needs and the economic support to that has forced a large number of people to opt for a self-entrepreneurship (Hart, 1973). The economy of the developing countries was then considered through two distinctive sectors one is the formal and another is an informal sector of the economy, it was believed that the expansion of the informal mode of employment is due to the inability of the formal market system to absorb the workforce of the state economy (Chaudhuri, 2000). Many scholars have believed that unemployment is the real cause of the expansion of street vending practices. The capital-intensive formal industrial markets have exposed the limited opportunities for the low-skilled migrants to the city, which means people are bound to join the informal mode of employment. In the 1980s, most of the developing countries were adopting the structural mode of the economic system which in a way choked most of the employment opportunities for the rural poor, thus they had no other option other than self-employment in the street vending practices. In the dualist perspective, the major point is that it separates the formal mode of employment from the informal mode of employment.

Structuralist approach

The structuralist approach promotes the concept that the capitalist system is the sole actor in forcing marginal people to opt for the self-employment option, as the capitalistic system command over the economic system and increases the competitiveness in the market, getting benefits from it. The capitalist tries to weaken the power of all the small-scale unions that bargain over the state to raise their opportunities for income (Williams & Round, 2010). The rise of informal mode of employment is because of the state's inability to absorb the surplus labour but it is the capitalist system which has structured the economic system in such a way that there is little space left for the marginal people of the state, the capitalist system changes the past socialist state's regulation and get full control over the economic system. The entire system has eventually culminated in a situation where the liberal market economics is beneficial for large-scale entrepreneurs, either decreasing the demand of the wage labourers or they cut the overall wage of labour and getting the labour at a much cheaper rate. The structuralist approach has also stimulated the quality of life of the self-employed marginal workers in a city. The extra-wage workers then opt for the self-employment option and street vending is the best option for the low-income people.

Legalist approach

The legalist perspective of informality research has focused on the role of the state in regulating informality. The status of formality is secured by those people or groups who are in power or are well equipped with a capitalistic set-up, people with marginal economic status and political connection generally position themselves in the informal set of entrepreneurship. Informality is the intrinsic another side of the formal setup; it is created through the strong regulation by the state over the self-entrepreneurship.

"The answer is to change our legal institutions in order to lower the cost of producing and obtaining wealth and to give people access to the system so they can join in economic and social activity and compete on equal footing, the ultimate goal being a modern market economy, which, so far, is the only known way to achieve development based on widespread business activity"

- (Hernando de Soto, 2002)

The street vending practice facing the institutional barrier can be seen as the major hold of the many of 1990s and 2000s literature.

Voluntarist approach

While many approaches are in the belief that state security is an important aspect of employment, many have claimed that street vending informality is the best option for the people as it is a personal choice to take the business endeavour. In the voluntarist approach, the street vendors are assumed to be flexible and have full autonomy in pursuing their livelihood activities. Street vendors being flexible and voluntary, they avoid the state's regulations and do not have to bear the cost that the formal sector economy pays (Maloney, 2004; Perry et.al., 2007). The voluntarist approach has

a sharp distinction from the legalist perspective, where the legalist view believes that people of the marginal economy are forced to choose the street vending practices (de Soto, 2002), because of the excessive regulation by the state in the formal economy, which they could not cope with. The voluntarist approach has argued that the policy-making process should consider the benefits of the informal practices and plan the policies accordingly through which both the state and people at informal economy would be benefitted. Many scholars argued in support of the voluntarist approach, that by self-engaging into own entrepreneurship, street vendors have secured the position to control their life.

The State's role and management of Street Vending practices

The historical debate around the production of informality has been going through the myriad political-economic trajectories, many have claimed that the emergence of unemployment is the main cause for the expansion of informality all over the world though it dominates over the global south cities. Since the notable claims by some global south scholars that the state plays a vital role in choosing the formal/informal binaries (Mcfarlane, 2010; Roy & AISayyad, 2004). Since this dominant claim of the state's role as the major stakeholder in the informality debate there has been a surge of literature contemplating on the states and the production of informality. Some scholars are of the view that the state is the revanchist actor in managing the street vending informality, some have given the ambivalent situation of the state's role in relation to the street vending management. Though the majority of the literature has presented the state from a leftist viewpoint so they have summarized the suppressive act of the state. The role of the state in managing the street vending phenomenon is categorised as follows-

State as a repressive and authoritative actor

Since the dominance of the state role in the characterization of informality got pace in the scholarly discourse of the global south city debate, there is a bunch of literature witnessing street vending informality in many cities of the southern and south-eastern countries. Boonjubun (2017) in his study of the street vending evictions shows that the city authority has opted the cleansing policies for its major city spaces, where street vendors are strategically surviving over the streets but they are struggling hard to stay over the city's public space. Lindell and Appelblad (2009) in their study of the Kampala city of Uganda, have claimed that the private interest has always marginalised the street vendors' claims in the city, though the vendors try hard to accommodate the private interest, the changing politics and the economics associated with that have further marginalised their claims in the city. Swanson's (2007) insights from Ecuador claimed a more extreme situation of the state atrocities, where the street vendors are identified on the basis of race and ethnicity. The state here has made the distinction between the local street vendors and evicted them on the basis of their racial character. Similar racial discrimination in the name of spatial ordering in the city has been identified by Munoz (2018), his study shows that the Afro-Colombians are more vulnerable to the state's street cleansing policies, whereas the locals are given the permits to convey their vending activity more conveniently. The Afro-Colombians are intentionally marked by the crimes and displacement, whereas the locals are given some space for many activities which is illegal to the Afro-Colombians. Öz & Eder (2012) in their study of the periodic markets in Istanbul showed how the local states are implying different strategies for a softer approach to eviction of the street vendors from the cityscape.

Ambiguous acts of the state

Another interpretation of the state act is That many scholars have found that states are not always repressive in managing the street vending informality, sometimes states have helped the vendors to better convey their activity. Lintelo (2017) in his study of the New Delhi Street vending practices, claimed that the planning regime of the global cities is not so straight rather the city's street vending landscape is shaped by the horizontal contestation between the state and non-state actors. Here public plays a vital role in the shaping of the street vending landscape. Schindler (2014) in his study of the street vending in New Delhi shows that the multiplicities of the governance regime have actually shaped the city. The formal regulatory regime might not be the only stakeholder in the planning of cities in the global south. The act of the multiple forms of organization contribute to the planning and management of the street vending informality. Hummel's (2017) contribution to the governance of the street vending phenomenon argued that the state sometimes encourages the informal traders to organize to lower down the cost of enforcement. So, the vendors' collective movement has accumulated power over the state's decision. Sometimes in the case of the southern

state, the violation of the law is being tolerated by the state because of the electoral cost. The marginal vendors might be the vote bank of the ruling political party, where their violation of the city rules and regulations can culminate the local barriers into new provisions (Holland, 2015). The everyday politics in the markets of Mumbai has dramatized the regulatory regime of street vending management. At times the corruption between the street vendors and the state officials has shaped the actual street vending landscape of the city (Anjaria, 2006). The municipal level relaxation of the strict laws those prohibit street vending has helped the street vendors to exist over the public space in China. The complicated implications of diversified laws and resistance of some of it by the street vendors have shaped the street vending landscape in the city of Guangzhou, China. The diversified forms of agencies and the implication of the ambiguous policies of the state over the public space management have shaped the street vending landscape of the city (Flock & Breitung, 2016). The ambiguous role of the state got the popularity after the claim that street vendors are the essential elements of the city's economics.

The supportive role of the State

The widespread acceptance of the importance of street vending in the context of the global south cities in many cases has led the states to be a little more supportive of street vending economics. The policies for the street vending in a city should be framed in a manner so that the city's market economy can better handle the street vending economics both for the benefit of the city people and for the employment opportunities for the unemployed people on the street vending practices (Ehrenfeucht, 2016). The kinship among the street vendors and also their relationship with the acting officials of the local state has created a soft zone of opportunities for the street vendors to exist over the city space (Batréau & Bonnet, 2016). Batréau and Bonnet (2016) also claimed that the relationship between the local administration and the street vendors have created a supportive environment for the street vending activity. The adoption of the parallel set of policies for different types of public space have created a vending-friendly environment.

Conclusion

Among the myriad issues of informality over the global south cities, the street vending informality is the most visible one which is subjected to serious state management. Thus, the role of the state in managing, restricting and evicting street vendors is a crucial aspect to introspect. In this paper, attempt has been made to contemplate over the long-term governance debate around the street vending issues. From the position of the strict state regulation, the present-day street vending barely face the mass eviction of them from the city's public space. The more serious question in present day research is that how to incorporate the street vending phenomenon with the main stream governance regime of the state. Thus, this critical review paper will help the dominant debate around the street vending research to incorporate more diversified issues of state regulation.

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