



When migrants produce the city: Everyday negotiations of urban space. Introduction to the special section

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Introduction to the special section:

When migrants produce the city: Everyday negotiations of urban space

Danièle Bélanger, Nadine Cattan, Diego Coletto, Jean-Baptiste Frétigny

This special section analyzes the dynamics and relations between migrants and city dwellers with the aim of moving beyond paradigms that focus on migrant victimization, exploitation, and precarity. At the crossroad of migration studies and urban studies, this collection seeks to explore how migrants and informal workers strategically negotiate their lives in the city and how they become an important part of the urban fabric. This section pays special attention to the informal aspects of how these social actors negotiate relationships and challenges in inhospitable environments. It brings together research on spatial and social relations between migrants and other actors in the public spaces of global metropolises, as well as secondary cities, and highlights the multiple ways in which the urban official order is challenged and subverted on an everyday basis. This collection focuses on migrants' and informal workers' agency and the contributions they make to the construction of urban life in Paris, Lima, Izmir (Turkey), Mexico City, and Tijuana.

Researchers have tended to overlook the theoretical, methodological, and empirical benefits of working at the intersection of migration studies and urban studies. The six articles in this section open up new paths by bridging these fields. All six manuscripts consider the rights to the city and to mobility for people in informal situations, such as being undocumented, having an ambiguous migratory status, and/or working in the informal sector. This special section seeks to address the following points. How do migrants and other city dwellers confront and redefine their identity in diverse public places? What kind of everyday strategies do they mobilize in order to enhance their access to the city and make advantageous arrangements on multiple scales? Which social networks improve the appropriation of public space and how is this space used in everyday activities? What conclusions can be drawn concerning the contested imaginaries of the city as these are negotiated, (re)produced, and challenged by migrants, actors in the informal economy, residents, tourists, urban planners, and governments, both local and national? A key hypothesis explored in this special section is that these capabilities, social relations, and manifestations are modes of political engagement with both symbolic and material features of the city.

The authors in this special section go beyond questioning how well accepted migrants are in cities to explain how sedentary and mobile regimes are linked in global metropolises and analyze the place attributed—or not attributed—to persons on the move.

The notion of temporariness and transit as modes of mobility are unsettled by the empirical findings of the articles. They show how populations on the move, while disrupting the regulation and imaginary of cities, participate in urban life, challenging modes of governance that are profoundly transformed by the intensification of all types of movement. The emotional content of this debate relates to considerations mainly of security, which challenge the right to the city by the legitimate and illegitimate orders of different actors. Each article shows how migrants, exiled persons, and refugees all claim a right to the city and highlights how these groups act on a city's materiality by questioning the sedentary urban moral order where transient individuals are seen as disruptive elements whose right to intervene in the production of the city must be denied.

Guillermo Candiz and Tanya Basok study the strategies developed by asylum seekers from Central America who are waiting in Tijuana, the border town with the United States. They use the research paradigm of mobile commons to highlight the dilemma faced by migrants in the trade-offs to be made in this border zone. They are caught between two choices: asking for access to the city and its resources by claiming citizenship rights, which give them a certain degree of protection (linked notably to obtaining migratory status which is recognized in Mexico), or pursuing their migration project and continuing their journey to the United States, despite further obstacles, via what the authors call “acts of mobility.” This tension in transit territories, of which Tijuana is emblematic, shows not only how migratory policies but also migrants' urban experiences transform such cities into hybrid spaces, where waiting is mingled with frontierization and so powers mobility as an active and ambivalent component of the urban fabric.

In their article about migrant street vendors in Paris (France), Nadine Cattani and Jean-Baptiste Frétey also question the right to the city through actions; however, they do so by surveying these migrants' capacities to manage interpersonal spaces with other users of urban spaces, especially tourists. By analyzing the emotional experiences stemming from interactions between vendors and tourists, they highlight three types of acceptability linked to bargaining, exoticism, and charity. Their article shows how, within this encounter of two types of globalization, the migrants contribute to reconnecting emblematic tourist spaces in Paris with the social diversity of a metropolis in all its political and ethical dimensions. Street vendors' creativity is demonstrated in their mastery of the distance and proximity they obtain through ephemeral access to the city.

The issue of access to urban resources by migrants is examined in very different circumstances by Laurent Faret, Andrea Paula González Cornejo, Jéssica Natalia Nájera Aguirre, and Itzel Abril Tinoco González. The migrants studied are en route to the United States and are often trapped in Mexico City, which is more and more at the confluence of a wide variety of migrant flows. This article focuses on the daily practices of newly arrived migrants from Central America and the Caribbean. It shows how the increasingly restrictive migration policy in Mexico City leads migrants to develop alternative, often informal, strategies in order to gain access to housing, work, health care, and education. Yet, even when they obtain elementary resources, they remain very vulnerable. The authors stress that such claims are all part of shared urban experiences, calling for a re-examination of the right to the city as a strategic and political instrument.

Diego Coletto, Lema Jaber, and Linus Vanhellemont examine rights to the city in terms of the unprecedented lockdown situations brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. By studying two markets in Lima (Peru), they reveal the reactivity and adaptability to this substantial change by street

vendors, some of whom are migrants from rural provinces. These two food markets, serving poorer populations, continued to operate during lockdown periods. Sales activities allowed vendors to acquire a new visibility and enter into a renewed dialogue with the local authorities about the relocation of their activities in Lima's public spaces. The article, thus, goes beyond the victimization image of these informal actors to pursue a new understanding and de-homogenization of their situation. By highlighting the importance of difference, it is possible to better ascertain the issues involved in this urban fabric and the public policies that seek to address a great variety of informal situations in which migrants are often stakeholders.

The territorial scale of the deployment of informal urban fabric stands out in Annaelle Piva's article, which examines the spatiality in camp settlements of exiled persons in Paris. She highlights the power games at work in setting up the limits of non-rights to the city and its resources. By making camp-sites invisible, police action represents a twofold regulation of space through dispersion and "peripherization." Despite the life-cycle of camp settlements reflecting the transitory nature and vulnerability of refugees, the author, drawing on the theories of Rancière, reveals alternative strategies for appropriating urban space and the emancipation processes refugees engage in to claim an effective space in towns. The article shows how camps become transgressive places that challenge the order established by the authorities and how they reflect the political dimension of exiled persons' presence in Paris's urban spaces.

By relocating the debate on the governance of refugees from urban margins (camps) to city centres, Cenk Saraçoğlu and Danièle Bélanger study the co-presence of Syrian refugees and Turkish citizens in Izmir, a major Turkish coastal city on the Aegean. This study aligns with Cattán and Frétiigny's work as it also observes that migrants assert their presence in these urban centres. It examines the daily life of Syrians in poorer neighbourhoods, characterized by a large variety of actors. An impressive body of ethnographical material makes it possible to decipher two forms of regulation on Syrians' presence in towns, established by host communities and resident Turks, namely socio-spatial marginalization and physical violence. Using a detailed, road-by-road scale of the city's districts, the article provides evidence of how control is established to discipline Syrian refugees' daily lives, by maintaining them in a powerfully unequal situation regarding access to urban resources. The way in which the issue of the legitimacy and acceptability of informal behaviour in the urban fabric is regulated leads the authors to conclude that there has been a depoliticization of the urban society formed by refugees and the host communities.

These six articles go beyond the binaries that dominate discussions about the lives of migrants and informal workers by shedding light on the hybridization processes at play in the city. Original insights into the everyday urban lives are offered, with an emphasis on both the (in)visibility of migrants and people who live in informal situations and the (in)formal relationships they construct with other actors in public spaces. These articles use a time-space perspective that attends to everyday (im)mobilities and itineraries. They document the ways in which different categories of informal workers and migrants access public spaces and, by (in)formally negotiating their right to the city, are both potential and effective co-producers of urban places and societies.

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