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Governing the nurturing city: The uneven enforcement of street food vending regulations

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Abstract

Street vending has drawn recent attention from city governments in both the Global North and the Global South. This paper focuses on the regulation of street food vending and its enforcement in four cities: Bangkok, Chicago, Hanoi and Montpellier. It draws upon qualitative interviews, archival and newspaper research, and ethnography. The regulatory frameworks raise several issues, because they deny access to space and income for groups that are often underprivileged, and they neglect the roles of street food in the urban food system. We show that the actual enforcement of regulations is uneven between and within cities and between vendors. In some cases, street-level negotiations around enforcement may actually mitigate the negative effects on underprivileged vendors. Hence, the governance of street food vending appears to be more nuanced than the formal regulations that exist. We argue that the design of regulations should better consider the street vendors' voice and their needs.

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Introduction

Street food vending is a feature of public spaces, and it is an important source of meals for many households across the world (WHO, FAO, & Mahidol University, 2012). It can provide a unique foodscape and atmosphere in neighborhoods while also (often) providing residents with fresh and healthy foods. It also poses several challenges, some related to food safety (such as handling practices and conservation) and some related to locational relations (such as the sharing of space with other activities, including pedestrian and vehicular traffic). In an international context where cities pay closer attention to their urban food system, there is rising scrutiny on street food, both positively, as a way to attract tourists and provide nutritious food to low food access areas, and negatively, equating it with an antiquated form of selling that is simultaneously dirty and obstructive. This rising scrutiny may lead to increased public control around the types of food that can be sold, the conditions in which it can be sold, who can sell it, and the locations where vending can occur within the city.

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, 2009) considers street food a significant supplier of food for urban low- and middle-income consumers, as well as income for low-skilled workers, especially in the Global South. The existing literature on street food, however, addresses very different questions depending on the location of the study. Most studies that consider Global South cities deal with food safety issues, and to a lesser extent food availability and consumption (Abrahale, Sousa, Albuquerque, Padrão, & Lunet, 2018). Meanwhile, there are far fewer studies focusing on street food in the Global North, and they tend to revolve around either its role in supplying specific ethnic foods (Tolgensbakk, 2018), its nutritional status (Albuquerque et al., 2019), or the development of food trucks (Agyeman, Matthews, & Sobel, 2017; Ehrenfeucht, 2017). A few papers also deal with the spatial pattern of street food, its connection with urban planning and its governance (Newman & Burnett, 2013; Cardoso, Companion, & Marras, 2014).

The goal of this paper is to reflect on the social and spatial role of street food within the urban food system, and to consider how regulatory frameworks, and the practices through which these frameworks are actualized in daily life (Painter, 2006), impact street food vending practices. Where can street food vending occur and who gets access to space and to the right to sell? While street food may be associated in public debates both with hip urban culture (Agyeman et al., 2017; Martin, 2014) and with “Third World” (Valverde, 2012), how is street food regulated and governed, beyond this North-South divide?

To address such questions, we look at the complex set of socio-spatial relationships around street food and consider multiple types of urban governance regimes (McCann, 2017), building upon the literature on everyday governance (Le Meur & Lund, 2001; Cornea, Véron, & Zimmer, 2017) and street level bureaucracy (Lipsky, 2010; Valverde, 2012). With McClintock, Miewald, and McCann (2021), we understand governance to

be “a set of social practices, institutions and power relations that connect various actors and institutions for the purpose of coordinating, steering and stabilizing the ongoing operation of a society.”

In the present research, we investigate how authorities in different contexts position themselves, frame and enforce their regulations, and consider how these regulations are negotiated, inflected or resisted at different levels, and what the consequences are for sellers. To this end, we draw on differentiated geographical contexts with contrasted regulation frameworks. We compare and contrast four case studies of street food regulation: Bangkok (Thailand); Chicago (US); Hanoi (Vietnam); and Montpellier (France). Bangkok and Hanoi, well-known across the globe for their street food culture, are in a process of clearing vendors from central areas of the cities, although at different scales. On the contrary, Chicago and Montpellier, after a long history of eviction, are designing regulations that may allow street food vending in limited places and capacities, while still maintaining strong controls over the streets. Each of these cities hence exemplifies a particular turn in the regulation of street food vending: strong eviction (Bangkok); increased control and formalization of street vendors and markets (Hanoi); revivification within broader food system planning (Montpellier); and design of a licensing system (Chicago). The cities also contrast in the role of public authorities in the food system. In Montpellier and in Hanoi, a strong planning culture at the national and local scales has resulted in an important role of national authorities in framing the urban food supply. While smaller in size than the three other cities, Montpellier is a pioneering city in terms of food planning, hence its policy towards street food is of particular interest. Chicago and Bangkok have a history of significant migration with small entrepreneurs making up the dense fabric of the urban food system. The comparison of these case studies will focus on the framing of policies regulating street food and the ordinary and everyday practices of vendors and street-level bureaucrats, in order to highlight the social and spatial impacts that negotiations and disputes around street food governance have on the daily life of city dwellers.

The remainder of the paper will be as follows: first, we present the methods; then, we describe the street food vending regulatory framework in each city. We next present our results regarding the regulations within each city, and how it is actually enforced and contested. Finally, we discuss the outcomes of those regimes of governance in terms of justice in the urban food system. We conclude with remarks on how municipalities can consider these issues when governing the use of urban space.

Methods and scope of the study

What “street food” embodies often remains undefined in studies (Abraham et al., 2018). In our study, we define street food as food sold in open spaces with a device that can be moved in less than 24 hours. We consider both ready-to-eat and unprepared foods and beverages that are sold from non-permanent structures in the streets. By “streets,” we include places that are open spaces. It therefore includes public spaces as well as private spots that are open and accessible to the general public. It encompasses streets and roads (either the roadway, the sidewalks or the unbuilt private lots contiguous to the sidewalk) and squares, as well as open-air private lots such as parking lots and public beaches. Traditional open-air markets also fit in this definition. Finally, we chose not to include small fixed stalls set in front of an indoor space, a typical setting for small restaurants in Hanoi, as they have access to a brick-and-mortar building. Hence, we only consider vendors with structures that can be moved in less than one day: for instance, stalls, trucks, or shacks that usually remain at a specific spot but can be removed quickly.

This study utilizes three types of qualitative data (cf. Table 1). First, in Hanoi, Bangkok, and Montpellier, we conducted semi-structured interviews with vendors in 2019 and 2020. These vendors were identified and selected based on their selling location, device, and in some cases their affiliation to a vendors’ network. The interviews dealt with their vending practices, their access to vending space, their socio-economic status and trajectory, as well as the regulatory framework. In addition, we conducted interviews with persons from various departments in the municipalities: law enforcement department, urban planning, public health department, etc. Finally, other informants, including leaders from street vendors’ networks, members of informal workers’ advocacy groups, and local researchers were interviewed. Interviews were transcribed and processed with the Nvivo software. Second, in Chicago, we report information from an ongoing ethnography of street cart vendors, using semi- and unstructured interviews, as well as participant observation methods. Third, in Chicago and Montpellier, we report results on the last two decades as part of an historical investigation comparing street food regulations in the two cities based on archival and newspaper records, focusing on information from the city archives of Montpellier, the Municipal Reference Library of Chicago, and local newspapers in Montpellier and recent US court cases. In all four cities, we also investigated the current laws, rules and regulations that affect street food vending, as well as the narratives and rationales that underpin these regulations. The combination of these data sources gives us a multilayered perspective on street food vending regulation and enforcement.

Location	Methods
Bangkok	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 31 interviews (30–60 min.) with street vendors • 12 interviews with local authorities (Bangkok Metropolitan Administration and ward levels) and other informants
Chicago	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long-term (12 year) ethnography with street cart vendors including two one-year periods of focused ethnographic research (2010–2011, 2018–2019); ongoing monthly interactions with Street Vendors' Association • Historical investigation based on legal cases, municipal documents and newspapers
Hanoi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 39 interviews (20–30 min.) with street vendors • 2 in-depth interviews with local authorities (provincial and ward level)
Montpellier	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 30 interviews (20–30 min.) with vendors • 14 in-depth interviews (90 min.) with vendors • 2 interviews with municipal officers • Historical investigation based on archival material and newspapers

Table 1: Summary of the collection of data

Street food vending and regulatory practices

Bangkok: Eviction in progress

In Bangkok, the products sold by street vendors are mainly ready-to-eat meals, sold from carts (cf. fig. 1) or fixed stalls. It is estimated that more than half of the households' food budget is spent on ready-to-eat food (although not entirely from street vendors) (Carrillo-Rodriguez & Reed, 2018) and urban residents commonly buy their meals before returning home for the day. Stalls and carts are found everywhere across the city, but particularly near transport hubs and important economic poles. They are also found in small alleys where they contribute to the food provisioning system. Additionally, many vendors sell fresh raw products and general food supplies from pickup trucks, including fruits, vegetables, meat, fish, and general grocery products (Wattanawanyoo, 2018).

Although street food is deeply rooted in Bangkok's identity, the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA) officially prohibited street vending as early as

1972, but at the same time allowed existing permitted areas to continue. Despite this, street vendors continued to work outside of the existing permitted areas. The prohibition has been irregularly enforced over time and space, ranging from complete laissez-faire to fierce eviction in recent years. According to Yasmeen and Nirathron (2014; 2019), from the 1970s to the end of the 2000s, authorities considered street vending as an income generator and a self-employment strategy, and therefore a poverty alleviation mechanism. However, in 1992, the BMA adopted the Act in Maintaining Public Cleanliness and Public Order, within which street vending was described as a threat to the “orderliness” of the city. Nonetheless, in the early 2000s, vendors working in permitted areas were registered and the number of permitted locations has increased through the decade. The crackdown occurred in 2016, a short while after the 2014 military coup. The BMA had a campaign claiming to “give back the sidewalk to pedestrians,” identifying street vendors as an obstacle to improve traffic fluidity for both motorized vehicles and pedestrians. The BMA subsequently started not only to enforce the prohibition of street vending outside of permitted areas, but also to close all permitted areas, one after the other.



Fig 1: Food stall in front of a construction site, in a business district in central Bangkok, 2019. Source: G. Pulliat

Figure 1 Alt-text: Photograph of two food carts parked on the street along a construction site in central Bangkok. The sellers stand on the sidewalk, that is fully occupied by their cooking material and stools for customers. They are cooking prepared meals with fresh products on their carts.

In several areas where street vending is still permitted, the hours when vending is allowed have been limited. For instance, in Khao San road, the main backpackers' neighborhood, street vending is now only permitted at night. Vendors report a loss of income due to these limitations. In terms of location, an almost complete eviction has been enforced in main business districts, such as around Siam Square, as well as on the main streets. Meanwhile, the interviewed vendors often consider that in small lanes they are less at risk of eviction, provided they move if the police show up (Vendors Interviews, May 2019).

The international press reported on the crackdown on street vending. As a response, the Tourism Administration stated that tourist neighborhoods, including Khao San and Yaorawat (Chinatown), would not be affected by the ban. Indeed, while police controls are reported to be frequent, the vendors in those wards remain in place. Furthermore, a pilot project of making some streets pedestrian with street food stalls during weekend nights in central areas was launched in December 2019 (Bangkok Post, 2019). During an interview in May 2019, the head of the City Law Enforcement Department explained that the enforcement of the eviction may be adjusted to the needs for tourism, if for instance, the City Planning Department intends to promote tourism in certain new areas. Hence, despite the ban, street food vending is allowed and even encouraged in specific spaces and contexts for tourist and leisure purposes.

Hanoi: Chasing informal vendors and markets away from central poles

In Hanoi, the capital city of Vietnam, food sold in the street consists largely of fresh food products (fruits, vegetables, meat, fish, etc.), and, to a lesser extent, prepared meals (mostly snacks). The city has a combination of mobile sellers (either walking with a shoulder pole, moving with a bicycle or selling with a food cart), dismountable fixed stalls, and spontaneous street markets (fig. 2). While some fixed vendors cluster around the main municipal wet markets, so as to benefit from their catchment area and to complement their offerings with cheaper, informally sold, products, others are found in small alleys that compose most of the urban fabric, especially in the newly developed neighborhoods where there is no municipal market (Hüwelmeier, 2018; Atomei, 2017; Geertman, 2010). A survey published in 2022 estimates that there are around 365 informal street markets (gathering more than 5 street vendors) in Hanoi, for a total of more than 15,000 sellers (Delmotte et al., 2022).

Street selling in Hanoi has been documented since the imperial times (beginning of the 2nd millennium CE). Yet, it lost prominence with the collectivization of the economy after 1954 (Nguyen, 2017). The practice of street vending re-emerged in the late 1980s, when the country turned from state socialism to a market-oriented economy in which individuals were allowed to run private small-scale businesses. From then until the early 2000s, street vending was tolerated and unregulated, as its role in bringing

additional incomes to farming families was acknowledged. However, since the early 2000s, the municipal authorities have tried to restrict street vending in an effort to modernize the city and control the uses of the streets and sidewalks, carrying out massive crackdown operations (Jensen, Peppard, & Vũ, 2013). In 2009, Hanoi officially allowed street selling, albeit under restrictive conditions; sellers were supposed to “avoid obstruction” (Decision No. 46/2009/QĐ-UBND) and to ensure the safety and hygiene of the products sold. This decision prohibited street vending on 63 streets, mainly close to tourist sites and on large avenues (fig. 3). Elsewhere, local People’s Committees (executive bodies that implement policies at the district and ward levels) are responsible for officially authorizing vendors to sell on roadsides and on urban sidewalks. The decision also prohibited street vendors from constructing and installing facilities and equipment “in any place on streets, roads and public spaces.” If strictly interpreted and enforced, this decision implies a *de facto* ban on most street selling, as this activity inevitably occupies public space and implies minimum equipment. The Department of Industry and Trade (DoIT), responsible for trading activities in the Municipality of Hanoi, considers fixed street markets as “temporarily authorized” but itinerant selling activities as “forbidden” (interview in October 2019). Street food vending is currently not included in the planning of future food retailing, which hints at the will of the Municipality to eliminate the practice within Hanoi in the near future.



Fig. 2: An informal street food market that is expected to be evicted in Hanoi, 2019.
Source: G. Pulliat

Figure 2 alt-text: Photograph of an informal market in the afternoon in Hanoi. Sellers settle on the side of the street along the buildings, as well as on the middle of the street, beside parked motorcycles. The sellers show their products on small plastic tables or directly on baskets put on the ground. The street is quite busy.



Fig. 3: Indication of prohibition of street vending in around a major tourist attraction in Hanoi, 2022. Source: G. Pulliat

Figure 3 alt-text: Photograph of a street in Hanoi. A sign indicates “cam ban hang rong” (“prohibition of street vending”) on the side of a large street along a major tourist attraction site in central Hanoi. Some motorcycles are parked on sidewalk a bit further away, while car parking occupies the full other side of the street.

Montpellier: Temporary permits in specific areas

In Montpellier, a medium-sized city in southern France, the open-air food markets are the official, traditional, and most common way of street food vending, as in all French cities. The locations and times of these markets are planned and regulated by the city government, while food safety is controlled by the national government. These formal markets are found at least one or two mornings per week in every neighborhood.

The municipal authorities strictly ban itinerant mobile vendors, which have largely disappeared since World War II, but historically, street food vending outside markets was more common, although greatly regulated. Documents found in the

municipal archives dating from 1895 to 1950 show that the municipality gave licenses for food vendors willing to operate in the streets for a precise spot, a selling device (basket, cart, tray, stall or shack), and a fixed time period (mornings only, seasonal, etc.), or for selling as a mobile vendor. Some products were not authorized in the streets, such as meat (only allowed in covered halls) or shellfish (forbidden in streets in summer). Mobile vendor licenses in particular declined over time, and eventually were made prohibitively expensive. The municipal authority sometimes rejected an application because the selling spot requested was considered as already overcrowded. The licenses were hence a way to regulate market competition among vendors in public spaces as well as to promote economic activity in particular areas (Archives Municipales, Ville de Montpellier).

Today, local authorities only give regular licenses for selling in halls, open-air markets, and on beaches. As for open-air food markets, the municipality decides where to create and settle new markets, the days of operation, and who gets a stall on each market. The rules to obtain a stall vary, however, a lot from one market to another (Perrin, Valette, & Cerdan, 2018). In 2020, we identified 37 regular markets and 5 food halls (for a population of approx. 460,000). In contrast, we identified very few mobile street peddlers: the informal food vendors on sidewalks and near markets are actively chased by the police in a “cat and mouse” game. However, in the poorest neighborhood of the city, a large informal market has grown rapidly during the COVID-19 pandemic with dozens of vendors without licenses selling cheap fruits and vegetables on stalls or on the ground every morning (Midi Libre, 2020). Fixed food stores located nearby complain about unfair competition and the municipal police regularly chase the vendors, who come back in a few hours. In October 2022 for instance, 25 policemen seized 2 tons of fruits and vegetables, and gave them to food banks. This practice of eviction has occurred regularly since then.

On the beaches, food carts vending donuts, ice cream and cold drinks are authorized but the number of selling licenses is limited and their price varies widely. In one studied area, the license is free. In another, the license for one food cart costs as much as €700 for the summer season. In addition, one local authority allocates a significant part of these licenses to vendors who have already been in the market for several years, making it even more difficult for the newcomers to access food vending on the beach.

Food trucks are mostly located on private lots, in areas with few or no alternative food options, especially in peripheral business districts or in front of discotheques at night. They offer a wide range of ready-to-eat food: those selling snacks and pizzas are traditional, while those selling healthy meals based on ethnic or local and organic products are seen as hip, new, and foreign. In 2018, an outdoor extension to a food hall opened, with sedentary food trucks that serve, among other things, Mexican and Vietnamese street food, as well as croque-monsieurs and burgers. The municipal

authorities grant food trucks access to public space only within formal open-air food markets or during ephemeral cultural events.

Finally, removable wooden shacks (“paillote” in French) offer raw fruits and vegetables in spring and summer times on the roadside or in roundabouts (fig. 4). Most of these shacks belong to Romani families. An interviewee emphasizes that his access to space is precarious, even though his license has been annually renewed for over 40 years (Loiseau, Perrin, & Pulliat, 2022).

The case study of Montpellier points out the diversity of street vending practices that can be found in a city of the Global North, beyond the well-knowns formal open-air markets. Vendors face different regulations according to the place and type of street food, while some rely on negotiations or precarious arrangements with municipality representatives, and others resist, sell informally and cope with regular evictions.



Fig.4: A temporary food shack on a road side at the periphery of Montpellier, 2019.
Source: P. Dupé.

Figure 4 alt-text: Photograph of a shack composed of wooden beams and corrugated iron sheet that sits on the side of a periurban road around Montpellier. The store is closed but a car is parked nearby. There are only trees and bushes around the shacks, no other kind of building. There are several flags on the shack.

Chicago: A licensing system with hurdles

Chicago, the third largest city in the United States, has for decades tightly regulated street food, largely officially for food safety reasons, but the past two decades have seen some change, including regulations allowing both food trucks and food carts.

Food trucks are motorized trucks usually serving a small, focused but often gourmet menu, while food carts are small, non-motorized carts from which are sold such things as tamales and roasted maize (fig. 5). Licenses for food carts have been much more difficult to attain than licenses for food trucks, and there remain many unlicensed (and thus informal) carts on the streets.

Street vending was an important food source during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, but was minor in most parts of Chicago from about 1940 until 1990. Restrictions on mobile food sales were expanded at the birth of the supermarket, ushered in by large-scale supermarket companies and independent grocers (Deutsch, 2010; Eastwood, 1988). While street food remained an important part of the New York and Los Angeles street scenes, for most of the last half of the 20th century, Chicago laws remained strict, discouraging sales and especially preparation of food on the streets. Licenses were confined to trucks selling ice cream and carts selling hot dog carts, eventually expanding to permit the sale of packaged snacks and uncut fruit. In addition, prepared food sales were allowed at festivals and within the Maxwell Street Market, a legally sanctioned open-air flea market; some unlicensed sales continued in immigrant, particularly Mexican, neighborhoods (Block & Rosing, 2015).

The amount of unlicensed food sales greatly increased between 1990 and 2010. Mexican immigrant street cart food vendors formed a concerted effort to push for an ordinance mandating the creation of a license for the sale of prepared foods by 2010. They coalesced as restaurant owners and celebrity chefs began pressuring for an ordinance to create a license for food trucks selling food prepared on the spot. Conscious of the strategic advantage offered by street food's broadening visibility, long-organized vendors from three predominantly Mexican neighborhoods began advocating for an ordinance to create a license allowing prepared food sales from street carts. Street vendors also reacted to the rhetoric of the food truck movement, which had effectively conflated a white, white-collar food professional with sanitized practice, tapping into racist tropes conflating "ethnic food" with a lack of regulation and sanitation. In response, street vendors aligned with local and state politicians, as well as different legal clinics, to advocate for regulatory measures. Street vendors couched advocacy for the value of their work in ethnic practice, as much as community contributions (such as cultural practices, the care with which they select ingredients and daily tidying regimens) and willingness to comply with regulation and standardization.

Still, since 2014, when the ordinance passed, and 2018, when the license and requirements were established, vendors have struggled with the lack of understanding of their small-scale endeavors to the city's business bureau and department of public health. Though attuned to the requirements to obtain licenses, only one vendor from the association had met the final requirements by the end of 2019. Public health and business bureau representatives ("window" workers) often expressed ignorance of the license terms or responded inconsistently to different applications for similar business practices and cart models. One public health department representative rejected applications

because vendors noted they would store carts at their homes, rather than a designated industrial kitchen facility lot, although this is permitted under the street cart license, a feature responsive to the scale of business it covers (personal correspondence). In another case, a licensing agent required that a cart be covered in a single metal sheet, while another cart passed inspection covered by four small sheets. Vendors address these piecemeal issues, under advice of lawyers, who also support vendors through a parallel push for consistent and informed responses by licensing agents. Though perceiving the wait time and burden of proof to be excessive, vendors anticipate eventual success and continue to renew food handling coursework while moving to purchase their rented and licensed commercial kitchen. The Chicago story points out the importance of identifying not only differences between street food regulations for different groups of vendors, but also the variances between how legislation is written and enforced, and the discretion of street-level bureaucrats over enforcement (Lipsky, 2010).



Fig. 5: A mobile vendor in Chicago: Juan Jose Gama Garcia starts his workday in the Gage Park neighborhood, July 20, 2021. (WTTW News) Source: <https://news.wttw.com/2021/07/21/how-shared-kitchen-helping-community-street-vendors-build-its-future>

Figure 5 alt-text: Photograph of a man who stands behind his cart in Chicago. He sells assorted snacks on his street cart. He wears a facial mask.

Comparing four case studies

Beyond the North-South divide, the four case studies share several commonalities (Table 2). First, street vending contributes to the urban food supply in original ways; in particular, it fills gaps in the urban foodscape. In Bangkok and in Montpellier, vendors reported working late in the evening when formal shops or

restaurants are mostly closed. In all the cities, some vendors explained how they chose their location in areas with few food options, such as in new peripheral business areas in Montpellier. The selling of ethnic food is another way to fill gaps; such foods may not be easily found in brick-and-mortar restaurants. This highlights the specificities of street food vending within the urban food system.

While selling practices are different in the four cities, the issues regarding the access to space to sell and the access to the right to sell are shared by all vendors. Even in contexts where street food vending benefits from a rather positive attention from public authorities, as in Chicago, vendors face an important set of limits: the licensing system appears not easy to navigate and it results in hardship to get a license and an adequate place to sell.

All four case studies also show a mixture of formal regulation and informal governance, inviting us to investigate the everyday practices of vendors and public power representatives (policemen, street-level bureaucrats). Various reasonings underpin the regulatory framework that shapes the conditions and rules to access the urban space for street food vending: the management of motorized and pedestrian traffic to ensure its fluidity, the safety of the products, and the economics of the food market to balance the competition with brick-and-mortar restaurants and shops. These reasonings are found in the four cities, at various degrees, and they result in various regulatory frameworks. Regulatory frameworks impact the way vendors manage their practices and assets, which influences their place in the urban foodscape. Thus, the comparison allows us to discuss the role that street food vending can play within urban food systems and how the various regulatory frameworks shape these particular foodscapes.

	Bangkok	Hanoi	Montpellier	Chicago
Regulatory Approach	Eviction approach	Displacement approach	Temporary permission and strong spatial control	Licensing with Regulatory hurdles
Main food sold	Prepared meals	Fresh and raw products, snacks	Snacks, prepared meals, fresh raw products	Snacks, prepared meals, fruit, deserts
Main selling devices	Food carts, stalls	Stalls, motorbike or bicycle, shoulder poles	Stalls, food trucks	Food carts, food trucks, backs of trucks, tables

Main types of location	Near transportation hubs, small alleys, informal markets on private spots	Authorized markets, informal markets in alleys	Open-air food markets, roundabouts and main roads	Sidewalks, streets
Regulatory framework	Designated permitted areas currently revoked, eviction process in most of the city	No licenses, street vending officially allowed but under strict conditions, banned in many streets	1-year licenses issued by the city on a case-by-case basis	Licensing system, but difficult to navigate
Vendors' network	Street Vendors' network, advocating against the complete eviction	None	None	Street Vendors Association Illinois Food Truck Association

Table 2: Main characteristics of the street food vending system in the four cities

Governing the streets: The rising constraints over uses of urban space

Street vendors settle in open-air areas, either public or private. During our interviews with vendors, a focus was put on how they accessed the place or places where they work and what rules framed their use of space. The interviews with city and police officers dealt with the current regulatory framework around street food vending and what the principles and goals underpinning these rules were. The results show that the street vending regulatory framework is embedded in a larger urban development plan towards “modern” and “world-class” cities. In this context, vendors navigate the rules to access adequate spots to sell.

The making of a “world-class city” and its consequences

In all the cities studied, several challenges limit what, how, and where to sell. Several limitations are intertwined with the goal of becoming a “world-class city”, which embodies inner cultural mixing as well as attracting international travelers and investment and economic, cultural and political influence at the regional and international scales (Massey, 2007). Planners’ discourse tends to consider traditional

street vending (except food trucks) as “backward,” as opposed to the imagery of a “modern” food system based on permanent built-in shops, restaurants and dedicated spaces (Wertheim-Heck & Spaargaren, 2016; Walvekar, 2017; Spire & Choplin, 2018). This conception is found across places and time: for instance, it was already prevalent in New York City in the 1920s (Basinski, 2014), and is still used today to undermine the role of street vending in the urban food system in several cities around the world (Walvekar, 2017; Battersby & Haysom, 2018). It results in a paradox; in Bangkok and Hanoi, in a context of opening to international trade and tourism, street *food* is praised as a heritage and the culinary culture is celebrated in a place-marketing policy (Boonjubun, 2017; Henderson, 2019), while street *vendors* are progressively chased from public spaces. An anonymous informant from the City Police Office in Bangkok explained: “[street vending] has to be regulated to make the city beautiful.” In Hanoi, the same narrative circulates, although the authorities refer to a “civilized” city (Nguyen, 2017). Chicago, like Bangkok, is a city that markets itself internationally as a food destination. However, it has generally lacked a street food scene even compared to competing US cities such as New York and Los Angeles. Allowing food trucks in limited locations is seen as both a way for existing restaurants to expand their selling locations into the street, potentially bringing local chefs in contact with more visitors, and for food entrepreneurs to have a cheaper way to open a food business. Food carts, however, are often overlooked by municipal authorities in the ways they add to the local food scene. They are seen as something more for local consumers rather than tourists and are instead focused upon more as something to be regulated rather than promoted. In a similar way, in Montpellier, the city invites food trucks to serve as caterers for cultural and sporting events, while prohibiting their day-to-day parking on the streets. Across the four cities, the idea persists that street food is preferably for tourists and leisure but not for daily food provisioning.

This notion of “modern” and “civilized” city comes with food safety concerns. In Hanoi, an official of the Hanoi Department of Industry and Trade (DoIT, Oct. 2019) argued that street vendors are unable to ensure food safety requirements. According to him, the political goal of “modernizing” the food retail chain is justified by the need to improve safety standards. In 2012, a national circular, issued by the Ministry of Health, laid out rules for ensuring food safety, with a specific focus on street vending. It requested food vendors to undergo a health examination, to have access to water for hand-washing, and to display their products at more than 60 cm above the ground. In Bangkok, street vendors are expected to complete a food safety training course delivered by the municipality, like workers in brick-and-mortar restaurants. While the discourse on food safety is obviously more prominent in Bangkok and Hanoi, the same argument is nonetheless found in Global North cities as well. In Chicago, food carts are subject to specific regulations that are linked to food safety principles. For instance, food can be assembled on carts but not cooked or prepared. Prepared (not assembled) food sold from carts also has to be pre-wrapped. Research on street food often focuses on food safety

issues, especially when they consider Global South cities (Abrahale et al., 2018); there is, however, no evidence that street food is inherently less safe than food sold in restaurants. Nonetheless, this common concern is a strong argument of public authorities to frame street vending regulations.

Vendors often have several food safety tactics, such as selling only a few products while keeping their stock in cool places, but these individual practices are not considered by public authorities while framing the safety rules. Moreover, some of the rules do not fit the way street vendors work; in Chicago for instance, some of the rules run counter to prevailing norms in immigrant communities, such as the customary practice of purchasing a mix of individual tamales of different flavors (Meeting observation Oct. 2018; City of Chicago Small Business Center 2017) while food must be sold pre-wrapped. These findings confirm what Valverde (2012) argues in Toronto. Local laws including complex licensing procedures, high costs, and sometimes “Kafkaesque” restrictions may limit the social and cultural diversity of street food vendors despite possible official support of city government to diversity initiatives.

Finding one's space in the urban fabric

The control over the location of street food vendors is high. Street selling regulations result in reduced access to public spaces for selling, particularly in city centers. In Bangkok and Hanoi, the evictions started in central wards. In Bangkok, an almost complete eviction has been enforced in main business districts, such as around Siam Square, as well as on the main streets. In Montpellier, the local authorities do not authorize food trucks to sell every day in public spaces because they want to protect restaurants and food stores from what is perceived as an unfair competition as running operating costs are lower. In Chicago, licensed food trucks are confined to particular areas that are located away from existing restaurants. Fines for violations are high, while food truck owners point out that there is no related restriction on the proximity of brick-and-mortar restaurants to each other (Alejo & Schoenecker, 2018; Kramer, 2019). Overall, in all the cities studied, constraints in accessing urban space to sell are high—and higher in city centers, and the regulations over the uses of public space increase in relation to the planning of world-class cities.

These observations are consistent with existing literature on street food vending. Previous studies in other locations show that the control over the uses of the public space is often stronger in “key areas” such as CBD or historical centers (Huang, Xue, & Li, 2014; Flock & Breitung, 2016). Street vendors are often evicted from city centers (Jellinek, 1997; de Pádua Carrieri & Benevides Dutra Murta, 2011), and it results in increased difficulty to find an adequate selling location. Indeed, the regulation of street food vendors can be traced to the regulation of public space in general, and the kinds of economic activity and people who are allowed to use public space. For instance, while

investigating the food system planning in Kitwe, Zambia, Battersby and Haysom (2018) show that food is absent from urban policy, but street food vending is framed as a public nuisance and clearances of street vendors occur regularly in order to foster a “modern, orderly city.” In the same vein, Milliot (2015) depicts the “reordering” of a Paris low-income ward through a police action to reaffirm State power against the informal use of urban space. Studying Belo Horizonte, Brazil, de Pádua Carrieri and Murta (2011) show that neighborhood revitalization was often a pretext to exclude vendors from central areas without addressing any social issues. Jellinek (1997) shows the relocation of a street vendors’ family over time as a consequence of the changes in the urban fabric.

Meanwhile, in our study, access to public space is reported as crucial by several interviewees. It is often a matter of precise location: sidewalks, central squares, crossroads, as well as areas near subway stations are particularly profitable and therefore valued by sellers and often reported as critical in the success of their activity. For instance, in Montpellier, the vendor of a seasonal shack (*“paillote”*) explains how he struggled to obtain his license for what he considers as the best roundabout in Montpellier: “I thought: you’re going to get fines, but you’re going to sell tons. I stood up to them and complained so much that they finally gave me a license for this location. And I wanted to sell exactly here, because the other sites, they’re worthless” (Vendor Interview, November 2019).

An argument used for selling on public space—rather than on private spots—relates to the cost. Access to public space is often cheap, if not free. In Hanoi and Bangkok, authorized street sellers must pay a cleaning fee that is extremely low. In contrast, in all the four cities, the cost for settling on a private lot varies widely. In Bangkok, a street market that we investigated had been relocated from the street itself to a private lot just beside the street; the cost for a spot increased from US\$3 per month to US\$6–18 per day. Additionally, finding an adequate private location is not always easy and may require access to sufficient economic and social capital. In Montpellier, a food truck vendor—who must park in a private spot—reported: “It’s a war, I have to fight not every day but almost, it’s the hardest thing we have to do, find a selling spot.” Moreover, private space owners from Montpellier sometimes impose constraints, such as coming every day or selling only at specific hours. The shift from public to private spaces therefore increases disparities in accessing selling spaces, to the expense of vendors with less ability to find and negotiate a private spot—such as newly arrived immigrants. While evicting street vendors from certain public spaces, municipalities sometimes provide support to find a new selling spot—as if spots were interchangeable. In Bangkok, the administration has set up new street vendors’ markets. However, these new markets are reportedly located in inconvenient areas: in peripheral neighborhoods, or in locations that are poorly accessible, for instance a place that requires crossing a major road, as opposed to locations along the main walking routes. An interviewee in Bangkok explained that while he first complied with the relocation rule, he finally came back to his former illegal spot because he could not make a living in their new market location.

Street vendors report that in most cases, they are not consulted to identify the relocation sites.

This concern regarding the street food vendors' ability to influence regulators' decisions is widespread. In Hanoi, the framing of the regulations regarding street vending is based on a "top-down approach" (Loc & Moustier, 2016), pertaining to the authoritarian context of the one-party state. Many street vendors blame the Municipality for not supporting them and for maintaining uncertainty: "The controls are always stricter; who knows how this will evolve for us?" an itinerant fruit seller complained. In Bangkok, the Street Vendors' Network was set up to advocate for the vendors' needs but they have trouble getting their voice heard. In Chicago, separate networks advocate for food cart vendors (Street Vendors Association of Chicago) and food trucks (Illinois Food Truck Association). The two groups both fight for policies that promote their business models, with the food cart vendors often complaining that municipal policies favor trucks over carts. Food truck owners, however, also feel that their voice is not always heard, and often complain of the overly strict regulations in Chicago, particularly around the limitations on when and where they can park their trucks to sell food. In Montpellier, we did not find any formal street vendors network or association. However, the Romani community negotiated in the 1970' an exclusive right to sell food in streets on the outskirts of the city, on public sites granted by the municipality, after they were excluded from vending in and around halls in the city center.

Across the four case studies, regulations facilitate certain forms of street food that match the contemporary neoliberalized orientation of planning and place-marketing policies. Street vendors are consulted in only limited ways throughout the decision process, while their livelihoods are highly affected by these regulations. Their specific needs, in terms of access to space, and specific practices, in terms of risk management for instance, are often overshadowed by other considerations—such as the commercial competition. This raises questions regarding the recognition of vendors' place in urban space and food systems.

The regulations in practice

Our observations show that the regulatory frameworks currently in force in the four cities are quite strict in their aim to control the practices and locations of street vendors. How are regulations enforced in practice? Beyond the proverbial observation that there is often a gap between the rules and how they work, it is important to investigate how a large range of actors with potentially diverging responsibilities, agendas and interests are shaping the practices of governance at different space and time scales. In his seminal book, Lipsky (1980, republished in 2010) explained how street-level bureaucrats have discretion and power over policy implementation, especially

when they have to cope with uncertainties and work pressures. Empirical studies have since demonstrated the influence of individual decision-maker characteristics (personal interests, moral values, gender, ethnicity) as well as client attributes (levels of needs) (Loyens & Maesschalck, 2010) in the way discretion is used. And Marinetto (2011) has underlined how personal beliefs and norms about fairness influence the personal judgments that bureaucrats make about the relative worth of citizens. During our fieldwork, we have observed negotiations in the enforcement of regulations by bureaucrats delivering licenses, district or ward officers, or policemen. Most of the compromises that mitigate the strictness of the official rules relate to the recognition of specific social needs—but this does not extend to all groups as some have more resources and power to negotiate.

Street food vending permits as a social policy

Historically, street food vending has often been considered an income generator for marginalized social groups. In Chicago, during the early 20th century, progressives and promoters of the Jewish, Italian, and Greek communities generally argued against regulations controlling street peddling, saying that food peddling was an important entryway into middle-class American life (Eastwood, 1988). In Montpellier, in the aftermath of World War I, licenses for street food selling were used as part of a welfare system: the social situation of the applicant played a significant role in the approval process. The elderly, people with movement impairments, veterans, and widows were given priority to receive licenses for street food vending, while foreigners were often rejected (Archives Municipales de Montpellier). In Bangkok, from the 1970s to the end of the 2000s, street vending was considered a poverty alleviation mechanism (Yasmeen & Nirathron, 2014); in particular a self-employment strategy for rural-urban migrants. Therefore, granting permits for street food vending has regularly and historically been used as a support for underprivileged urban groups who face adversity within the formal job market and who lack economic capital to invest in fixed facilities. In Hanoi on the contrary, no official permit is delivered to authorized street vendors.

Such social goals are rare to non-existent in the current regulatory frameworks, as we have shown in the previous section of the paper. However, there still are discrepancies between the written rules and the way they work in practice, and there is a sense of compromise in the enforcement of the rules in many cities that could be interpreted as an example of street-level bureaucrats' discretion over enforcement. Several respondents mention that a difference exists in how vendors are treated by the police based on their socio-economic status. For instance, a 75-year-old vendor with a cart, selling on a wide sidewalk in front of a public park in the central ward of Bangkok, said: "The police are kind to me. I am too old, this is why they ignore me." Similarly, an old physically challenged woman was similarly the only peddler not to be harassed by the police in Montpellier. Likewise, a 30-year-old woman selling fruits in front of a

temple in Bangkok considers that the reason why she has never been arrested so far is the fact that she has a kid with her, so when police officers come, they ignore her. She points out as a comparison that her husband, who also works as a street vendor just a block away, faces more control by the police than she does, although she is based in a more sensitive space. Hence, access to selling spaces can be used by the law enforcement authorities as a way to mitigate social inequalities. Nonetheless, in Bangkok, all the vendors interviewed had reported a loss in their income since the onset of the campaign against street vending.

Negotiations and arbitrary enforcement

Social status and networks inflect this politics of tolerance, as the lighter enforcement of restriction does not extend to all vendors from underprivileged social groups. In Montpellier, the right to sell at temporary shacks is exclusively granted for Romani families, as a compensation for their eviction from the city's food halls in the 1970s. However, an interviewee mentions that this access to space remains precarious; he explains how he has to negotiate and exert constant pressure on the mayor to renew his license each year. Their right to sell still depends on their relationships and the bargaining balance with the local municipality. Some of those shacks' vendors also struggle to get access to water and electricity—several of them do not have these utilities and do not know why a power connection is not granted at their spot. In Chicago, despite regulations allowing food carts to be licensed, the vast majority are not, and still exist as being “generally tolerated but illegal” and thus subject to the whim of the police and food safety authorities. In Hanoi, a significant difference remains based on the power relationships in the city, resulting in an increased exclusion of marginalized groups. Roving vendors, most of them women migrating from rural areas, report being continuously harassed and fined by the police, while long-term city residents, who sell food in front of their house gate, maintain good relationships with local authorities, and pursue their activity for decades without facing any trouble (vendors' interviews, 2019–2020; Turner & Schoenberger, 2012; Stutter, 2017; Eidse, 2023). The enforcement of regulations on street vending, and the subsequent eviction campaigns, are enmeshed in relations of power and differ depending on the different actors' capacity of negotiation and resistance.

Therefore, regulators (city agencies and policing authorities) have a significant ability to decide whether or not to permit street food vending, which results in the uneven enforcement of regulations at both the citywide and local scales. They have an important power over the actual uses of urban space, and their decisions are sometimes considered arbitrary by sellers. For instance, a vendor who has worked in an area for a long time, or one who is considered socially worthy of support may be allowed to vend in a prime selling space if they have good relations with local police and health authorities. These situations are very precarious, however, and could change quickly with a complaint from

a neighboring business, or a change in the specific person in charge of enforcing laws. Furthermore, negotiations between vendors and authorities can lead to corruption, patronage systems (Batréau & Bonnet, 2016) and clientelist relations (Lindell, 2008). Consequently, depending on how the rules are enforced at the very local scale, the actual regulatory practices may mitigate the adverse effects of evictions and restrictions on marginalized groups.

As shown before, regulations are unevenly enforced over the city. There is a spatial dimension in enforcement that pertains to practices: the material context impacts the way the regulations are enforced, as it is more difficult to control and prevent vending in the context of mobility, in narrow lanes distant from the main roads, or in the outskirts of the city. Uneven enforcement is not only a matter of tolerance based on values (such as social needs), but also a matter of material context. Street vending, with its intrinsic mobility (immediate or deferred mobility), allows for escaping control and neutralizing restrictions. Therefore, the ability to move is an advantage, but it requires specific selling devices that come with an opportunity cost. An interviewee in Bangkok clarifies that she was keeping her shoulder pole selling system because it allowed her to escape the police, although it resulted in lower quantities to sell (hence, lower income) and harder working conditions. The practice of fleeing to escape controls is a soft form of “everyday resistance” (Scott, 1985). Even though it is not an overt opposition to regulation, it contributes to a form of permissiveness and resignation from enforcement officers who rarely engage in man- or woman-hunts.

Hence, the effectiveness of enforcement depends on the discretion, good will, values and personal interests and relationships of some local street-level bureaucrats, but also on the spatial context and on the agency of the sellers.

Discussion: governing street food vending to enhance food justice

The discussion and analysis of street food vending practices in our four case studies (section 4) has shown that street food vending contributes to the urban food supply with specificities both in terms of location—mobility allowing bringing food to areas with few other options—and schedules—for instance vendors working at night when formal shops are closed. Hence, we argue that street food vending fills a gap in the urban foodscape (Vonthron, Perrin, & Soulard, 2020) in an original way that is linked to its versatility, mobility and flexibility. Our results then show (section 5) that current regulation trends induce rising constraints in accessing space, even in contexts where street food benefits from a positive perception from local authorities. For various reasons, the implementation of regulations is, however, uneven across the city and across vendors; while the most underprivileged sellers among the interviewees seem to be the

most exposed to the negative outcome of the strengthening of regulatory frameworks (such as newly arrived rural-urban immigrants with no social network or easily accessible other job options), the actual enforcement practices may mitigate this risk. Hence, how does the way street food vending is governed affect sellers, and in particular lower-income street vendors? In this section, we discuss whether regulatory frameworks support or undermine justice in the urban food system, and how the governance of street vendors' informality addresses these justice issues.

Food justice in the city

Street food regulations and their enforcement raise questions in terms of food justice. "Food justice seeks to ensure that the benefits and risks of where, what and how food is grown, produced, transported, distributed, accessed and eaten are shared fairly. Food justice represents a transformation of the current food system, including but not limited to eliminating disparities and inequities" (Gottlieb & Joshi, 2010). Applied to street food, such a food justice prism considers how different groups of people are preferentially allowed, or not allowed, to determine how streets are used for selling, as well as differential levels of access to space and food, and resistance to injustices within current systems. Beyond a distributive justice perspective focusing on allocative outputs for diverse social groups, we also consider procedural justice dimensions (following Fraser (1997) and Sen (2010)), looking at how the specific needs of lower-income vendors, or vendors from marginalized social groups, may be better taken into account and involved in everyday street food governance.

The question of access to street food selling spaces and jobs is critical in distributive terms: the right given to immigrants, farmers, and other deprived people to sell in the streets can come as compensation for their lack of opportunities in the formal job market. Urban space is here considered a resource, which can help mitigate socio-economic disparities. While not all street vendors are poor, several interviewees clarified that they started this business because they were lacking significant economic capital and social networks to enter wage employment or to start a formal activity. It is in particular the case for food trucks in Montpellier but also for roving vendors in Hanoi. The COVID-19 crisis has reemphasized this economic opportunity of street food vending in urban public space. Recent research shows that hawkers have been welcomed back in cities where they were excluded, especially in China, as a response to the economic crisis (Allison, Ray, & Rohel, 2021). In Montpellier, the informal open market has grown rapidly since COVID-19 (Midi Libre, 2020, 2021). Here, it is a coping strategy both for vendors and consumers: customers confirm that they find there the lowest prices, while many local residents stroll through the market without buying anything, just for the fun of it. Local authorities often acknowledge the economic, social, cultural, and health benefits of street vending. An interviewee from the police in Bangkok, while considering that street vendors must be controlled to limit their number

and their occupation of space, also acknowledged: “There is a need for street vendors, because people survive with cheap food.” These concerns for justice sometimes result in a certain degree of tolerance regarding street food vending, and certain street food vendors, as developed above.

In procedural terms, marginal street sellers have low control and bargaining power over the changing foodscape. They are never in a position to “claim some kind of shaping power over the process of urbanization” (Harvey, 2012, 5). In the four cities studied, there is no arena nor mechanism for vendors in general to participate in the governance of street vending. Moreover, the most vulnerable ones are the most affected by the eviction processes or by overly tedious licensing procedures. Arguments concerning the poor sanitary standards of street food vending, and the disturbance of public order that this activity might cause, are rarely evidence-based. They instantiate a “bourgeois environmentalism” (Baviskar, 2021) that reflects middle-class concerns about a specific socio-spatial order at the expense of lower classes’ interests. Our case studies hence confirm that street-level governance structures may impose aesthetic and moral biases (Valverde, 2012).

The governance of informality

Mobility, adaptability to local conditions, reactivity to opportunities, and flexibility of the working conditions are specificities of street vending. All of these characteristics may not fit within the common spatial and economic regulations of “modern” cities and come with various degrees of informality. Informality is here understood in the sense that Hart gave to this term when he first coined it (Sindzingre, 2006): activities and practices that occur beyond or outside regulations—that is, economic informality, but also a non-regulated use of space, or safety protocols that differ from written regulations.

Public authorities continue to devise regulatory frameworks to better control street food—in terms of the space it occupies, its economic practices, as well as food safety. In our cases, street vending activities occupy the full scope of positions between the formal and the informal: while some are fully compliant with the regulatory framework of the State (such as the licensed open-air markets in Montpellier), others are officially banned and must work to escape the police (such as the itinerant street vendors in Hanoi as well as the informal open-air market in Montpellier). Hybridity between formal and informal seems to be the common condition of most street food vending. As they endeavor to formalize street vending, public authorities in Hanoi and Bangkok promote the image of virtuous and docile street vendors who comply with food safety norms and who are willingly relocated in infrastructures deemed “civilized” and “clean”—regardless of the actual needs in terms of location that vendors may express.

Similar exclusionary effects of formalization have been described for urban agriculture practices in the United States (McClintock et al., 2021).

The potential adverse effects of street food vending regulations are highly related to the governance of informality. Street vending is usually practiced in places that are not originally designed for commercial purposes, and when these places are public, it is used as an argument for eviction: vendors are not originally entitled to work in such places. Therefore, the simplicity of the rules (economic, spatial and sanitary alike) and the flexibility of their enforcement are key to design a regulatory framework that preserves the benefits of street food. The success of Portland's street vending scene is considered a result of this flexibility (Newman & Burnett, 2013; Browne, Dominie, & Mayerson, 2014). Meanwhile, in New York City, Devlin (2011) raises concerns regarding the opacity of regulation, putting vendors at risk of tickets and threats because they fail to be fully aware of the current rules. We found similar results in Chicago and Hanoi.

Informality does not necessarily bring more justice in the food systems and its glorification may have harmful neoliberal overtones. Informal employment also implies an absence of contracts, of labor rights, of protection, and of bargaining power (Davis, 2008). Access to private spots is competitive (prices are higher) and sometimes precarious as well (resignation without prior notice). While the institutional environment creates barriers (Cabannes & Marocchino, 2018), it also offers stability, predictability and minimum rights to food sellers, and more food safety guarantees for consumers. Informality may make vendors vulnerable due to revenue uncertainty, precarious occupation of space (Racaud, Kago, & Owuor, 2018) and potential hostility of public authorities. Informality also potentially results in patronage practices and attendant unjust treatment of vendors. For street food vendors, informality brings about both adaptability and vulnerability. Mobility tends to exacerbate this dual condition, as the possibility to move is often offset by the risk of being evicted.

Conclusion

What are the social and spatial outcomes of the current governance of street food vending in cities? Beyond the North-South divide, our study shows that competition over the uses of the urban space in key parts of the cities tends to increase, resulting in adverse effects for street food vendors and therefore fueling injustice towards the most precarious of them, whose coping capacities are scarce. The enforcement of regulations, however, acknowledges their roles within the urban fabric and foodscape and has often mitigated these injustices. We argue that street food vendors, thanks to the flexibility of their activity and their mobility, may contribute to fill gaps in the foodscapes of all four cities. The right to access to public space for selling is essential to support this contribution.

Municipalities and planning authorities could better recognize street food features and the vendors' right to the city, with a particular attention given to affordable food supply that contributes to low- and middle-income city dwellers' access to food. This would require more active participation for the main stakeholders and a process of tailor-made, inclusive and limited formalization. If street food is used as a marketing tool to promote a vibrant atmosphere in certain neighborhoods—a model that comes with high economic and sanitary standards—it should not be at the expense of other street food vendors nor less-privileged consumers.

Street food vending is an interesting prism through which to analyze urban governance in different contexts. Beyond the North-South divide and apparently contrasting formal regulatory frameworks on which the scientific literature often focuses, our findings point out to commonalities in the socio-spatial relationships involved in the everyday governance of street food. Different levels of power, from the state to the street, contribute to shaping a prosaic mode of governance where public authorities temper the enforcement of the law depending on the vendor's practices, positions and resistance, and on a certain sense of tolerance and justice.

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North-South comparison; public space; urban planning; informality; urban food system

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