

CfP: Street Vending in Comparison

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Street vending does not fit smoothly into common categories of social and economic history. In European historiography of the 20th century, street vending has not gained much attention. It has been regarded as a form of traditional retailing which was supposed to vanish in the course of modernization. It did not suit the concept of advanced capitalism nor of that of socialist economy. In the context of research on global labour history and on the informal economy, however, numerous studies have illustrated that street vending did not disappear but persisted, re-emerged or even flourished in the 20th and 21th centuries. In fact, various forms of street vending can be found in many countries, if not in every one. Apart from the common understanding of street vending as an expression of underdevelopment, as a makeshift and even humiliating way to cope with unemployment and poverty, one can find other – more positive – perceptions as well. Street vendors can also be seen (and have understood themselves) as labourers, as petty capitalists or as (plucky) entrepreneurs.

With respect to the topics addressed, debates on street vending show remarkable similarities despite the differences in their historical and geographical contexts. Arguments in favour or against street vending refer to tradition, the price and quality of goods, tax-paying/evasion, il/legality, un/fair competition, hygiene, consumer protection, consumerism and convenience, and – last but not least – the possibilities of making an honest living. Although street vending has commonly been seen as marginal problem, the questions it raises concern basic terms and conditions of economy and trade: Who should be involved? Who should get access to a permit? What should be involved, which kind of goods or services should be offered? Where should business take place? How should it be conducted?

The particular terms and conditions of street vending, the possible income and the perspective it might provide are an outcome of struggles between practices of vendors, vendors' organizations, their competitors, as well as of customers and state administration with its various agendas. Street vending takes place in quite different socio-economic and institutional settings and constellations. These are not only organized differently. They also underlay formalization and trade regulations very differing extents, with varying possibilities for

enforcing and/or circumventing street vending. In this sense, for all the apparent similarities in the rationales for it, we do have to ask whether we are really dealing with one and the same phenomenon.

This session aims to bring together historians, sociologists, anthropologists etc. who study street vending practices and developments in different regions of the world. In particular, the session aims at addressing the problems of comparing such a worldwide phenomenon by examining

- the different constellations in which street vending practices take place,
- the traders' practices, their self-organization, self-perception and trajectories;
- their relation to competitors, producers, suppliers and consumers; and
- the vendors' interaction with the authorities, legal regulations, the efficacy of state practices and the production of the formal/informal character of street vending.

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You can find further information on the conference at <https://esshc.socialhistory.org/esshc-valencia-2016>