

IN FORMAL

MARKET— PLACES

*Experiments with
Urban Reconfiguration*

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naioio publishers

IN/FORMAL Marketplaces
Experiments with Urban Reconfiguration

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This book is part of a multi-sited research project carried out over the past two decades, which has investigated the complex worlds of informal marketplaces. It is a follow-up publication to the two-volume set *Informal Market Worlds*,¹ which brought together case studies of 72 informal marketplaces around the world as well as texts by important voices in debates about urban informality, such as Keith Hart, Saskia Sassen, Ananya Roy, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, AbdouMalik Simone, Vyjayanthi Rao, Teddy Cruz and Fonna Forman. A key aim of this worldwide survey of informal marketplaces was to demonstrate the global dimension and relevance of informal trade. Our goal was to expose the different ways in which the informal economy is a vital part of today's globalised world and how it is intertwined with everyday life everywhere. In the *Informal Market Worlds Atlas*, we grouped the extensive array of case studies into nine categories, ranging from 'notorious markets' and 'post-conflict markets' to 'people's markets' and 'hipster markets'. This broad spectrum not only illustrates the structural variety and operational diversity of these markets, but also points to crucial differences in how these spaces are perceived, evaluated, and valued, a theme which serves as one of the guiding threads of this new publication.

In keeping with the fact that one of the most powerful characteristics of informal markets is their constant state of flux, the focus of this book is on processes of transformation, not only in terms of physical changes to existing marketplaces but also with regard to the growing interaction between the formal and informal spheres. While formal-informal linkages and hybrid economic governance are commonly perceived as buzzwords that characterise contemporary processes of urban reconfiguration, it cannot be overlooked that incorporating informality into the workings of the formal economy is just as conflict-laden as efforts to regulate informal markets. Both directions of integration have transformative effects that leave neither end untouched. The book aims to investigate these tensions by systematically examining the transformations

underway at twelve marketplaces selected from our initial global survey. With a particular focus on the correlation between on-site spatial transformation and cross-sectoral development policies, the book maps and analyses the spectrum of spatial interventions in the setting and operation of distinct informal markets. In doing so, it seeks to yield new insights into the changing relationship between the formal and informal sectors in terms of participants and operational methods, as well as emergent strategies of resistance.

In collaboration with a range of onsite research partners, we have focused on selected sites that were already part of our original informal market survey in order to delineate the scope, intersections and tensions of ongoing processes of 'incorporating informality' in as much detail as possible. We hope that the findings of these studies will provide a timely assessment of the ongoing and accelerating hybridisation of formal and informal economic practices and their speculative deployment in the pursuit of new market opportunities. Since such developments are designed not least to incorporate the economic power of informal productivity, a precise diagnosis is needed as to how the fabric of finely tuned collaborations and mutual arrangements that sustain informal marketplaces is impacted by far more influential economic actors. Our main proposition here is that attempts at integrating the economic potential of informal marketplaces differ widely, ranging from market closures and relocations, to structural upgrades and the transformation of informal markets into closely regulated shopping environments, regardless of their role as a crucial lifeline for millions of people at the bottom of the economic pyramid. Building on existing models of investigating the implications of formal-informal linkages through typologies of governance transformation, such as 'replacement – undermining – support – competition'² and 'complementary – accommodating – substitutive – competing',³ we have developed a multi-dimensional mapping matrix that aims to extend these analytical frameworks by adding four distinctive *spatial* parameters, which are mirrored in the

¹ Peter Mörtenböck and Helge Mooshammer, eds., *Informal Markets Worlds – Atlas* (Rotterdam: naiOIO publishers, 2015); Peter Mörtenböck, Helge Mooshammer, Teddy Cruz and Fonna Forman, eds., *Informal Markets Worlds – Reader* (Rotterdam: naiOIO publishers, 2015).
² Gretchen Helmke and Steven Levitsky, 'Informal Institutions and Comparative Politics: A Research Agenda,' *Perspectives on Politics* 2, no. 4 (2004): 725–40.
³ Anna Grzymala-Busse, 'The Best Laid Plans: The Impact of Informal Rules on Formal Institutions in Transitional Regimes,' *Studies in Comparative International Development* 45, no. 3 (2010): 311–33.

structure of this book: Forced closure / Relocation / Improvement / Appropriation.

Exemplifying rather than representing the diversity of informal marketplaces currently being transformed into hubs of formal economic activity, each type has been investigated in three different locations in order to trace particular patterns of economic incorporation across sites that can be distinguished from other types of intervention. Acknowledging both the multi-faceted economic, social, political and cultural aspects of each site and the complexity of its spatial and logistical arrangements, the book includes a range of forms of graphic representation – maps, tables, diagrams and other formats – in order to highlight different kinds of ‘integration’ as well as corresponding spatial policies. Making visible the patterns of spatial intervention and their correlation with a network of state and non-state actors, communities of interests, economic powers, conflicts and negotiations on a local, regional and global level, these visualisations bring into focus different degrees of economic incorporation as well as policy trends, regional tendencies, and other demographic, social and cultural dynamics. By producing novel insights into these developments, we hope to advance our understanding of how formal and informal economic practices converge into new kinds of hybrid urban governance. We also hope to contribute to current debates around the form and direction of how economic informality should intersect with local environments, national policies and supranational actors, and especially to discussions about how these linkages, incorporations and reconfigurations can contribute to envisioning more equitable urban environments.

The making of this publication has been intertwined with a series of international research forums conducted in collaboration with distinguished universities and initiatives. We would like to extend our gratitude to Chulalongkorn University’s International Program in Design and Architecture (INDA) for hosting the Informal Market Worlds International Research Forum III held in Bangkok in January 2023, and to Vineet Diwadkar, Pitchapa Jular and Christo Meyer for their invaluable support. Our sincere thanks also go to Mauricio Corbalan and

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*Peter Mörtenböck and
Helge Mooshammer, July 2023*

In recent years, open-air marketplaces have enjoyed a steady growth in popularity unequalled by almost any other type of urban facility. Community markets, organic produce stands, seasonal handicraft bazaars, eye-catching container structures, colourful street food vans and customised pop-up stalls are all now part of the repertoire of nearly every urban renewal programme. This boom in markets in the urban space has been accompanied by changing perceptions of the unfinished, improvised, recycled and handmade. In times of uncertainty and multiple intersecting crises, the 'old', 'uncompromised' and 'authentic' has gained significant currency. Along with new lifestyles, changing patterns of consumption, deregulated urban development, resentment towards industrial mass-production, and the desire for meaningful experiences and instant gratification, marketplaces have become the expression of an avant-garde culture of urban entrepreneurship, entertainment and excitement. They epitomise the forms of cultural capital deemed most appropriate in the neoliberal restyling of urban space.

While many features of such marketplaces evoke a sense of informality and spontaneity, the way in which they furnish the urban space is shaped by a finely calibrated aesthetic. As a facilitator of curated retail environments, elevated customer experiences and meticulously controlled design, informality refers in this context to a particular style rather than a structural condition. As part of a precisely detailed aesthetic staging, this informal appeal defines a space for those who are committed to the new culture of entrepreneurial urban upgrading. For them, the marketplace, charged with nostalgic attributes, social media moments and urban pioneer spirit, is simultaneously an identity-forming moment and a professional stage – an amenity of live-work-play-scapes designed for the new urban culture class. A closer look, however, reveals that beyond its informal *appeal* informality also has a *structural* aspect: precarious employment, opaque supply chains and contracts, selective governance of market participation, strategically curated diversity, and variegated levels of accessibility all mark the emergence of logics of informality outside the confines of the so-called 'informal sector'.

Yet while we are seeing a mushrooming of strategically erected new marketplaces meant to exude a sense of authenticity and immediacy, large numbers of longstanding 'informal' markets that have hitherto escaped regulatory attention are increasingly coming under threat. Some are being shut down, some evicted and relocated, while others are being transformed in such a way that not just their appearance but their entire anatomy and mode of operation is affected, as evidenced by significant changes in the composition of

vendors, consumers and offerings. The variation in the degrees and forms of transformation is mirrored in the array of political motifs, policy instruments, architectural typologies and actors involved: providing for basic needs is overshadowed by the promotion of consumer satisfaction; well-coordinated processes that enable low-key, equal access are supplanted by visions of the city as playground; the duty of care for public space is transformed into entrepreneurial opportunity. Together, these dynamics illustrate an expanding array of actions aimed at, on the one hand, formalising informality (by integrating informal activities into hegemonic flows of power) and, on the other, informalising selected protocols of urban economic conduct (by ostensibly transferring agency to target subjects). While each of these developments merits closer inspection, as a whole they seem to signify a shift in urban cooperation that entails a repositioning, reformatting, and reconfiguring of social and economic agencies. Important here is not so much the conflicting views and interests involved but the convergence of trajectories of the incorporation of informality.

Contextualising the forces driving these evolving amalgamations of market environments highlights not just the fact that struggles around defining informality are still not over but that they are intrinsically tied to changing combinations of structural and aesthetic concerns. What constitutes the confines of the formal and informal is thus often a matter of perception and interpretation, and is prone to misinterpretation and confusion depending on one's role, position, and where and how one relates to a particular site. In a meeting at a prestigious US university during the course of this research, one of the foremost thinkers on urban informality shared an anecdote about a research team from another highly regarded academic institution that had set out to study an informal settlement in the Global South. The team had already spent an entire week on site, meticulously recording every detail of the neighbourhood, producing drawings and maps, and taking pictures of every nook and cranny, when they suddenly realised that the site they were studying was not an informal settlement at all, but a government-supported housing scheme that merely looked 'informal'.

The message here, of course, is not to confuse appearance with substance and that aesthetic appeal should not be mistaken for the structural makeup of an environment, in particular when a sophisticated understanding of the interplay between informal aesthetics and the political economy of informality is required. Far from merely providing flavour or enhancing appearance, aesthetics seems to have emerged as a potent catalyst for driving structural change, not least through its cloaking capacities. The attraction of informally styled new marketplaces in neighbourhoods facing intense gentrification pressure, for instance, obscures the increasing informalisation that has become a hallmark of structural



Top: Patpong Night Market, Bangkok, 2023
Bottom: Roadside market, Salton City, California, 2022

changes in labour, production and trade. In such markets, informality presents itself as an aesthetic spectacle not *despite* but *because of* commonly exercised structural informalisation. This spectacle disguises the outsourcing of responsibilities to individual vendors, the precarious employment of support staff, and the lack of quality control of merchandise.

This uncritical celebration of 'informally' styled marketplaces highlights a parasitic relationship between structure and aesthetics in the different pathways of spatialised capital accumulation. From custom branded wall murals and monumental follies used as visual markers to hand-painted signage, out-of-place objects and specially curated programmes of urban greening – the immediacy of captivating aesthetic interventions in the urban landscape that have emerged at the nexus of global capital and neoliberal modes of expression often serves to mask unresolved issues of excessive privatisation, displacement, underpayment, social cleansing, inequality and exclusion. It also obfuscates the way in which cities themselves are becoming primary business actors rather than mere locations for business operations. Turning marketplaces into arenas in which these dynamics are played out and formal-informal linkages are crafted between different urban actors has become a favoured approach in contemporary city-making. This pattern is not confined to the well-known cities associated with neoliberal urban economic development, such as London, New York, Paris and Tokyo, but is evident worldwide in cities as diverse as Ahmedabad, Bangkok, Barcelona and Dubai, as they strive to attract 'impatient capital'.¹

Urban economic development practices

Paralleling the conflict-ridden surge of marketplaces that mobilise new conditions of informality are thousands upon thousands of existing markets around the world whose long tradition as a crossroads of formal and informal economic trajectories has also come under pressure in recent years. These marketplaces can be found in diverse settings, ranging from cross-border trading hubs and the underground economies of popular markets to clandestine workshops and unregulated online trade channels. Over the years, these sites have shown enormous persistence and creativity as they navigate the challenges of persecution, expulsion, restructuring and incorporation. Strategically complying with and subverting laws to assert themselves in the face of adversity, they often intersect with the realms of defectors, warlords, smugglers, middlemen, speculators, profiteers, migrant workers, self-entrepreneurs and petty dealers of all kinds. It is this crowded intersection of otherwise

disjointed sets of experiences that enables informal marketplaces and their actors to inconspicuously redefine the boundaries of assigned identities and assume multiple roles. One of the most important, yet sometimes overlooked roles these sites play in the political and ideological framework of neoliberalism is their trail-blazing function in the reconfiguration of the city. Whether as a mechanism for urban renewal efforts and subsequent gentrification or as an alleged nuisance whose elimination promises better things, wherever there is financial pressure on 'improvable' urban space, markets are loaded with potential.

Due to their visible presence in the urban fabric, informal marketplaces are the spatially most tangible part of the informal economy, an economy that serves to secure the livelihood of half the world's population. More than five decades have passed since the anthropologist Keith Hart first coined the term *informal economy* in an attempt to give a name to unrecognised income-generating activities that he had studied in Ghana and to 'insert a vision of irregular economic activity into the debates of development professionals'.² His point of departure was the widespread lack of openness he saw in academic and professional circles towards the plurality of forms of social and economic conduct that exist in different parts of the world. Significantly, Hart's conceptualisation of the informal drew on an understanding of form as a mental construct. However, in the following years he also saw the idea of the informal economy operationalised in institutional efforts to organise society along formal lines imbued with power. Revisiting his earlier take on the informal economy in the *Informal Market Worlds Reader* forty years later, Hart pointed out that within the money/power nexus of neoliberalism 'the informal economy seems to have taken over the world while cloaking itself in the rhetoric of free markets'.³ In view of the increasingly complex interlinkages and entanglements between formal and informal aspects of economic operations, he concluded that it has become a matter of urgency to develop a more dynamic understanding of the informal economy and to expose the principles that organise formal-informal linkages today.

Given this change in the political, economic and cultural parameters impacting the linkages between the formal and informal, it is worth considering whether we are currently encountering a comparable discursive ignorance, at a moment when studies of informality have become well established across a wide range of academic disciplines and policy-making is prioritising the incorporation of informal energies into the workings of the formal sector. Are we once again being confronted with a prevailing perception that remains oblivious to the uncharted ways in which formal-informal

¹ Rahul Mehrotra, 'Between Equity and Impatient Capital: Making Indian Cities,' *Journal of International Affairs* 65, no. 2 (2012): 133-37.

² Keith Hart, 'How the Informal Economy Took Over the World,' in *Informal Market Worlds: The Architecture of Economic Pressure – Reader*, eds. Peter Mörténbäck and Helge Mooshammer (Rotterdam: nai010 publishers, 2015), 35.
³ Hart, 'How the Informal Economy Took Over the World,' 33.

linkages are currently unfolding in cities around the world? Are we relying on a hegemonic vocabulary and institutionalised thinking that primarily serve ‘to organise a segment of the academic and policy-making bureaucracy’?⁴ And are we as a consequence unable to articulate the subtle yet nonetheless significant changes in the morphogenesis, role and dynamics of informality?

Blurring boundaries

Over the past decades, several areas of concern have arisen that problematise the prevailing framing of informality as tied to income-generating activities operating outside the regulatory framework of the state. One pertains to the fact that with the exposure of urban populations to the forces of globalisation and neoliberalisation, income generating activities have become far more complex and diverse and are now often embedded in contexts that blur the difference between formal and informal aspects of economic operations. This changing landscape of income generation, social development and political participation has necessitated acknowledgement of the intricate interconnections between formal and informal elements of economic activity. Another factor contributing to the debates around formal-informal linkages is the rise of new urban realities that have emerged in the wake of technological developments, economic crises and new forms of labour. For many people today, working hours – as related to income generation – are no longer confined to a designated workplace but have become just one of multiple parallel strands in their daily routines. This shift not only makes it difficult to define what constitutes work and remuneration – for instance, for purposes of taxation or legal protection – but also blurs the boundaries between spheres, such as the private and the public domains. Recalibrated modes of exchange and cooperation across distinct segments of urban populations, new forms of urban mobilisation and new cultures of social entrepreneurship have dramatically changed the assumptions and organisational contexts underpinning the relationship between formal and informal economies. In light of these changes, we are currently seeing increased interest across the political and institutional spectrum in accessing the potential of the informal economy by integrating its entrepreneurial energies, assets and networks into wider economic circuits.⁵

Attesting to this growing interest, the development of many informal marketplaces around the world has been characterised by a variety of attempts at integration. Besides juridical (trade licences,

rights of use, etc.), financial (access to credit, poverty alleviation, etc.), infrastructural and organisational measures (access to piped water, electricity supply, agreements with informal workers’ unions, etc.) such attempts often revolve around spatial organisation and range from the forced removal and relocation of informal markets to urban fringes or the dispersal of market activities into other neighbourhoods to the demarcation of dedicated areas that do not interfere with formal business and the allocation of trading space in permanent market halls, where maintenance and services are provided on a fee-for-service basis. Street vendors, even though they are the ones most affected by the regulation and management of informal trade, rarely feature in these decision-making processes. Despite the vast networks of actors involved in creating distinct spatio-economic contexts for these developments – policy-makers, planning officers, architects, property owners, developers, legal representatives, vendors’ associations, political activists, NGOs, and other stakeholders – many ‘integration’ projects are thus still governed by an authoritarian, paternalistic concept of realigning the workings of informal economic activities and making them fully compliant with the requirements of formalised settings based on exclusionary principles and standards.⁶



Old Baltic Station Market, Tallinn, 2017

4 Hart, 'How the Informal Economy Took Over the World,' 35.
5 See, for instance, International Labour Office, *Women and Men in the Informal Economy: A Statistical Picture*, third edition (Geneva: International Labour Organisation (ILO), 2018); Rina Agarwala, 'Incorporating Informal Workers into Twenty-first Century Social Contracts,' UNRISD Working Paper No. 2018-13 (Geneva: United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD), 2018); Martha Chen and Francoise Carré, eds., *The Informal Economy Revisited: Examining the Past, Envisioning the Future* (London and New York: Routledge, 2020); Franziska Ohnsorge and Shu Yu, eds., *The Long Shadow of Informality: Challenges and Policies* (Washington, DC: World Bank Group Publications, 2022).

What spatial interventions into informal marketplaces thus bring to the fore is the absence of intrinsic boundaries between ‘formal’ and ‘informal’ economic conduct. Both terms reflect particular roles assigned within a continuous economic fabric. Although often characterised by uneven power relations, the distinction between ‘formal’ and ‘informal’ is not necessarily synonymous with the disparity between the wealthy and the poor. There is ‘informality from above’, just as there is ‘informality from below’⁷; there is ‘elite informality’, just as there is ‘subaltern informality’.⁸ And there are degrees of planning, order, deliberations, and protocols relating to informal markets, just as there are to formal markets. It is partly due to these porosities and overlaps, then, that the term ‘integration’ masks a range of extra-market processes, ideologically biased goals and purpose-driven interventions that are central to the ongoing creation of a global market and economic standardisation. For these reasons, it is important to acknowledge that beyond direct and overt strategies of transforming informal markets there are also political and social undercurrents linked with the struggle to control these sites and to benefit from their economic informality.

This wider field of influences on urban market environments is reflected in two different developments, both of which are linked to the increasing dominance of neoliberal forms of economic urban restructuring. Firstly, there is a revised understanding of the informal economy as an alternative, multi-faceted mode of economic governance outside state regulation.⁹ This mode of governance is characterised by dynamic interactions encompassing spatio-economic integration, transnational capital flows, institutional processes and bottom-up restructuring. It is within these interactions that links are forged between the current integration of informal vendors into urban/global value chains and the restructuring of formal-informal linkages into new techniques of governance. Employing terms such as ‘bricolage’, ‘synergy’, ‘composition’ and ‘hybrid governance’, the language often used to describe these endeavours suggests a parity of relations in the urban realm. But what these accounts of incorporation of informal economic practices tend to overlook are the distinctive needs of entrepreneurial and survivalist informal actors, the developmental impact of hybrid governance arrangements and the different ways of integrating informal vendors into economic growth and civic participation.

Secondly, the changing relationship between the informal and formal sector is also reflected in the recent rise of self-employment and increasing state support for start-ups, micro-businesses, social entrepreneurship, and peer-to-peer industries (micro-lending,

7 Gustavo Lins Ribeiro, ‘Economic Globalization from Below,’ *Etnográfica* 10, no. 2 (2006): 233–46.

8 Ananya Roy, ‘Urban Informality: Toward an Epistemology of Planning,’ *Journal of the American Planning Association* 71, no. 2 (2005): 147–58.

9 Kate Meagher, ‘Unlocking the Informal Economy: A Literature Review on Linkages between Formal and Informal Economies in Developing Countries,’ WIEGO Working Paper No. 27 (April 2013).

crowdfunding, and platform services, to name just a few) in countries of the Global North as well as the Global South. Sanctioned by the state, this surge in new forms of income generation, which for growing numbers of workers means long working hours, poor pay and no protection by state laws, situates the transformation of informal marketplaces within historical trajectories of strategic urban transformation, colonial exploitation and political resistance. Key shifts in global economic conduct and their impact on the current transformation of informal marketplaces are thus informed by two different aspects of neoliberal economic urban governance. On the one hand, expansive capital interests increasingly target economies of poverty as frontiers of investment and accumulation.¹⁰ On the other, novel entrepreneurial cultures such as those instigated by peer-to-peer marketplaces, social entrepreneurship and the gig economy animate a changing climate of development policies both in contemporary urban economies in the Global North and in top-tier emerging economies in the Global South. Both aspects converge in marketplaces that are at the forefront of urban reconfiguration and have become the site of experiments with the incorporation of informality in cities around the world.

The architecture of formal-informal linkages

The ongoing spatial transformation of informal markets is not only indicative of these macro-economic changes. It is also playing an instrumental role in the generation of new economic climates. In some cases, it signifies generative activity through alternative knowledge and use of city services, land, and livelihood strategies. In others, it represents an expansion of the market economy’s reach into new territories, particularly within the framework of markets run by the poor in developing countries. What emerges from these dynamics are distinct incorporations of informality, both in the sense of absorbing the economic capacities of informal activities and in the sense of adopting informal methods in the conduct of the formal economy. This highlights the need for urgent discussions about how and by whom this process is to be managed and controlled. In this respect, informal markets need to be addressed as important sites of negotiation where new forms of interaction and new kinds of entanglement involving a variety of urban as well as global actors are explored.

From Bangkok to New York and from Amsterdam to Buenos Aires, in/formal marketplaces demonstrate how the growing interaction between informal and formal spheres has a transformative effect on both – leading to a formalisation of the informal sector and an ‘informalisation’ of the formal economy. The phrase ‘incorporating informality’ thus seems to beg the question as to *what* precisely



Top: IJ-Hallen Flea Market, Amsterdam, 2022
 Bottom: Smorgasburg Los Angeles, 2023

is incorporated into *what*. What are the contours of the socio-economic sphere into which something is incorporated and what is the nature of the incorporated information? Instead of directing our analysis at the supposedly immutable identity and enduring stability of a receptive body that goes by a particular name, we propose focusing on the mutually transformative effect of processes of incorporation. The incorporated entity alters the incorporating body as much as it is absorbed, processed and transformed by it. Incorporation cannot take place without such interaction, influence, and mutual impact.

Placing an emphasis on the *relationships* between economic informality and other domains, as well as current *practices* of in/formalisation," shifts the focus of such debates from measuring the size and properties of the informal sector to developing an analytical matrix that captures the dynamics of strategic interventions in the informal economy. These dynamics include not only the different degrees of integration involved and the policies pursued in the incorporation of informality into mainstream economic activity, but also the mutual effects of these processes, as well as the impact of actions from below on forms of governmental organisation. Rahul Mehrotra has located these dynamics in the mutual arrangements between what he has termed 'static' and 'kinetic' cities. The Kinetic City and its dependency on 'mutual integration without the obsession of formalised structures', he notes, 'is where the intersection of need (often at the level of survival) and of the unexploited potentials of existing infrastructure engenders innovative services.'¹² Supporting and blurring the formal and informal, this urban fabric is sustained by volatile, piecemeal linkages between different worlds whose separate identities collapse in moments of incorporation.

Architecture is what gives material shape to these linkages. Its physical and symbolic operations temporarily solidify the fugitive qualities of incorporations into more comprehensible forms. Holding in place situations that are in flux, architecture creates a forum through which differing aspirations, values and capacities can momentarily become compatible with each other. Rather than merely expressing such linkages, architecture actively regulates processes of incorporation and transition in the built environment. In this role as an organising device, the function of architecture is not so much to accommodate the social and economic practices that connect different urban actors, but to engage in creating, maintaining and propelling a variety of linkages between the formal and informal. Always generating new possibilities, volatile mixtures and short-lived situations, formal-informal linkages are less hard-wired ties than the constant creation of compatibilities. As both site

¹¹ Colin McFarlane, 'Rethinking Informality: Politics, Crisis, and the City,' *Planning Theory & Practice* 13, no. 1 (2012): 89-108.
¹² Rahul Mehrotra, *The Kinetic City & Other Essays* (Berlin: ArchiTangle, 2021), 186.



Street trade alongside Feria do Antiguados y Libreros, La Merced, Valparaíso, 2017

and practice of mediation, they provide a stage for simultaneously bringing together and keeping apart different market actors.

Embedding conditions of improvisation, impermanence and transience into the built environment, architecture often emulates the dynamic qualities of incorporation. It does so by signalling, both structurally and aesthetically, the ephemeral character of sites dedicated to commerce and trade. Pop-up tents, folding tables, bag chairs, collapsible canopies, inflatable decorations, rolling carts and container market stalls: a vast and increasingly complex array of flexible strategies has emerged to manifest the volatile and transient character of open-air marketplaces, even if these markets have achieved a sustained presence in the urban fabric over a longer period of time. Suggesting a sense of mobility has become a kind of lifeline for the precarious yet increasingly endorsed existence of trade situated, intentionally or unintentionally, at the intersection of formal and informal economic operations. Notwithstanding the many difficulties that might be associated with their concrete form of occupying space and time, one of the greatest, albeit still not always recognised, assets and achievements of such strategies is the collective creation of new market environments – sites of trade and commerce – that offer opportunities for economic growth.

If the predominant goal thus no longer seems to be to overcome or eradicate informality as such, then the different configurations of informal-formal linkages take on a new importance. A central

question here is how particular aspects of the formal and informal can become, or be made, compatible. Since there is a variety of different perspectives, experiences and assumptions involved in the practices that affect informal marketplaces, it is important to consider the different qualities of compatibility and incorporation that are made possible through the emergence and management of a particular set of interfaces. This uneven field of experimentation with urban reconfiguration constitutes the current terrain of critical engagement with formal/informal linkages, particularly as dominant approaches to the integration of the economic potential of informality differ significantly, ranging from market closures and relocations to structural upgrades and the transformation of informal markets into closely regulated shopping environments.

Tracing the ways in which architecture is employed in these attempts opens up a range of new questions. How do forms of spatial integration (or disintegration) relate to contemporary shifts in socio-economic frameworks and policy-making? How can these relations be understood in ways that go beyond simple dichotomies (e.g. enabling vehicle vs. Trojan horse) and pseudo-causal linear processes (e.g. economic integration follows spatial integration)? What kinds of dynamics have evolved in response to the problem of making formal and informal economies compatible? Who benefits most from the values created with the compatibilities and incorporations they engender? How do such interfaces come into being, what governs their operations, and what are the consequences associated with their variations?

From clamping down on informal trade to appropriating urban environments

Simultaneously geared towards inclusion and exclusion, the assiduous reshuffling of urban economic opportunities and the tension it implies has become one of the main concerns of our long-term research into informal markets specifically and urban informality in general.¹³ The apparent struggle between bottom-up initiatives and top-down manipulation, between recognition and disavowal of the values generated by informal traders and its reflection in the implementation of contrasting spatio-economic policies has led us to further investigate emergent and diverging forms of *incorporating informality*.¹⁴ It is precisely the constantly fluctuating character not just of the varied interventions in informal marketplaces but of the informal sector itself that makes attempts at categorisation seem

¹³ See for instance the two-volume publication *Informal Market Worlds – Atlas & Reader*, which brings together more than 70 case studies of informal marketplaces from around the world and highlights the global dimension of informal trade in the twenty-first century, and which concluded the five-year research project *Other Markets*: Peter Mörtenböck and Helge Mooshammer, eds. *Informal Market Worlds: The Architecture of Economic Pressure – Atlas* (Rotterdam: nai010 publishers, 2015) and Peter Mörtenböck, Helge Mooshammer, Teddy Cruz, and Fanna Forman, eds. *Informal Market Worlds: The Architecture of Economic Pressure – Reader* (Rotterdam: nai010 publishers, 2015).

¹⁴ Between 2018 and 2023 researchers and activists from around the world, including Vyjayanthi Rao, Allan Cain, Paul Chu, Vineet Diwadkar, Melisa Vargas, Samar Halloum, Mauricio Corbalan, Pio Torroja, Trude Renwick and Anton Nikolotov, amongst others, joined us once again in a global forum to explore the formal-informal linkages that shape the relationships between informal trade, neoliberal governance, and urban development.

initially futile and meaningless. However, what can be contended is that there exists a spectrum of transformative political interventions ranging from the eviction of informal traders and their expulsion from urban public space to the simulation of informal market cultures as a means of breathing urban vitality into 'emergent' neighbourhoods. In contrast to a methodology of categorisation that separates different entities, and thus disconnects them, the framing of this vast theatre of action as a spectrum allows us to focus our attention on the forces and vectors shaping the continuous re-assembly of this field – whether they collide, merge, intersect or overlap, emerge from within, enter from outside or escape altogether. These dynamics produce a chain of four distinct force fields, ranging from *forced closure* and *relocation* to *improvement* and *appropriation*. One end of this spectrum is dominated by the wholesale denial and eviction of informal trade in the form of market closures. This is followed by the relocation of marketplaces, which partially recognises their economic prowess and social function but seeks to avoid direct contact and visibility. If informal markets are allowed to remain where they are, they are often forced to undergo substantial processes of realignment readily framed as improvements. Lastly, the other end of the spectrum is characterised by a kind of informalisation of the formal economy, in which the set-up, atmosphere and allure of informal marketplaces are emulated at purpose-built or chosen sites in order to capture some of their entrepreneurial energy.

The closure of long-running informal markets such as the vast Cherkizovsky Market in Moscow, the Saphan Lek street market in Bangkok, and the open-air La Salada market in Buenos Aires, one of the largest sites of trade in counterfeits in Latin America, can be seen as the most radical way of intervening in the vitality and productive functions of such global nodes of informal trade. Markets of this size require a complex management of contacts between different elements, a 'heterogeneity of articulations that requires rethinking the ways in which value is produced, the subsumption of that productive diversity to the power of capitalist rule, and ways of inhibiting, counteracting, and even resisting that subsumption.'¹⁵ Clamping down on these markets undermines the ambiguities that help to sustain the logistical and territorial framework of their operations and dismisses the values generated in a web of informal activities, collaborative capacities and entrepreneurial dynamics in favour of simple narratives of good and evil. In many cases, disputes regarding the spatial conditions of these marketplaces – unbearable overcrowding, lack of sanitation, and fire hazards – have been strategically linked with ideological attitudes, such as anti-immigrant sentiments, nationalistic sympathies and pro-liberal market biases.

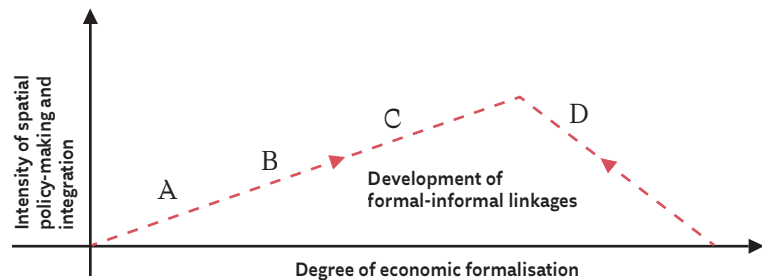


Top: Moskva Mall, Moscow, 2022
Bottom: La Salada Fair, Buenos Aires, 2022



Saphan Lek Market (demolished), Bangkok, 2012

Moscow's Cherkizovsky Market was the largest of several such key distribution nodes for 'grey' imports from China and Eurasia into Eastern Europe that have been shut down in recent years. These markets served armies of 'shuttle traders', who ferried bulk goods to far-away villages and towns. Often constructed out of stacked shipping containers, they offered precarious habitats for many thousands of undocumented migrants. In the case of Cherkizovsky Market, racially motivated arson attacks and the discreditation of non-Russian oligarchs not only fuelled political polarisations surrounding the market's closure in 2009 and the subsequent economic fall-out, but also helped to legitimise the incorporation into new economic ventures of profitable networks and business relationships that were the market's existential foundation. Positioning informal markets as extra-legal spaces that need to be reined in may

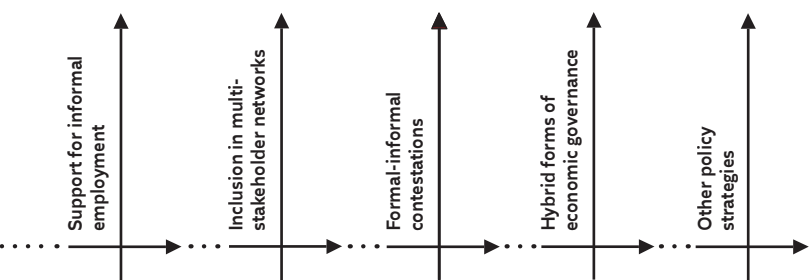


Forms of incorporation
 A: market closure B: relocation C: onsite improvement D: entrepreneurial appropriation

lead to a suspension of trade but can leave enough continuity in place for some market actors to reorient the formal-informal linkages created during the markets' operations towards other modes of capital accumulation. The flexibility, contingency and volatility of these linkages are often manifested in the pursuit of other kinds of arrangements, styles of operation and modes of trade.

The eviction of vendors from and demolition of such informal markets frequently leads to a fragmentation of value chains and a displacement of activities to other neighbourhoods. Many traders try to make the most of the situation and negotiate provisional arrangements elsewhere, before they are once again forced to move on. This continuous dispersal of trade keeps transactions on the move, exploits the differentials of mobility, and perpetuates the experimental character of activities rather than consolidating them in a particular location and fostering community-based growth. In the aftermath of recurring closures of territorially based informal markets, an explosive growth of online trade platforms, such as Mercado Libre in Buenos Aires and the darknet platforms Hydra, OMG, Kraken, Blacksprut and Mega in Russia, has increasingly absorbed substantial portions of these economic circuits. The shutdown of trade thus selectively disrupts particular formal-informal linkages and thwarts precisely coordinated local arrangements, while at the same time widening the geography of informal trade beyond the limits of site-specific accumulation and leverage.

More often than not, international intervention is one of the factors that lead to the forced closure of informal marketplaces once they attain a significant scale. As a way of securing favourable trade agreements and attracting global finance, authorities often strive to shore up a city's reputation as a global business hub. As a result, international economic pressure is brought to bear on local spatial development policies and a range of measures are taken that demonstrate efforts to tackle the trade in counterfeits. For instance, local and regional authorities in Thailand have a long tradition of targeting selected marketplaces as priority areas of anti-counterfeit enforcement. Bangkok's 'Red Zones' are regularly listed in the



Further parameters of incorporation

United State Trade Representative's annual Special 301 Report on countries' compliance with US copyright policies and in its annual Review of Notorious Markets for Counterfeiting and Piracy (Notorious Markets List)¹⁶. Street vendors operating in market areas included in this expansive documentation of alleged violations of intellectual property rights, such as Saphan Lek, Siam Square and Khlong Thom, have been evicted and whole markets demolished due to mounting international pressure. However, there have been no suitable contingency plans provided for evicted vendors. Although this course of action conflicts with other municipal programmes that seek to recognise informal trade as an integral part of urban development, it follows the long colonial tradition of "indirect rule", in which power takes on an insubstantial and vicarious character, functioning through deputising governmental projects rather than direct foreign intervention. Today, with the intensification of struggles over immaterial property, such conflicts over the ownership, use, and dissemination of intangibles are becoming ever more relevant. The closure of informal marketplaces is now employed as a means of leveraging policy-making, legislation, and enforcement efforts in countries around the world.

Relocation of informal markets: from displacement to displaceability

While efforts to shut down informal markets focus on incorporating informality by redirecting the nominal volume of informal economic operations, relocation programmes seek to utilise informal traders as helpful facilitators of this trade flow, albeit under highly altered and much more controlled circumstances. In such attempts at more 'peripheral' incorporation, legal and policy instruments tend to converge with particular spatial typologies that suggest a more orderly and defined form of trade. Often it is rising land prices in central city locations or the attempt to make unique areas in a city 'more presentable', to bring them into line with the visual appearance of global, that is to say investable, cities, that trigger the impulse to relocate informal markets to areas on the urban fringes that are out of the way of global business operations. Be it spatial interventions within the framework of international development programmes as in the case of the Dajabón binational border market, national restructuring efforts as in the case of Luanda's once bustling Roque Santeiro market, or the local appeasement of global capital as in the case of Ahmedabad's Gujarati Bazaar, the displacement of vendors from inner city locations to places external to and distant from the city has become a systemic condition.

Oren Yiftachel has suggested interpreting these processes less as spatio-political acts than as governmental techniques, as giving shape to conditions of 'displaceability'. Other than the term



Binational Market, Dajabón, Dominican Republic, 2012

'displacement' (the factual fulfilment of the intention to displace vendors), displaceability denotes the 'susceptibility of people, groups and developments to be removed, expelled or prevented from exercising their right to the city.'¹⁷ It is linked to control exercised through an omnipresent threat of displacement and the complex struggle over future urban continuities and ruptures. These conditions are at the heart of the precarious character of urban citizenship negotiated in the imposed restructuring of spatial settings that organise trade. The relocation of the Dajabón binational market on the Haitian-Dominican border, for instance, formed part of a major EU-funded development programme that involved the erection of a two-storey market building next to the diverted and also new-built main border crossing. Initially located in the streets in central Dajabón, this binational market is enabled by temporary relaxations of border restrictions, allowing Haitian intermediary traders, predominantly women, to cross into the Dominican Republic on selected days. This intertwinement of the market's spatial development with the volatile geopolitical position of the Caribbean island of Hispaniola is emblematic of different registers of incorporation at play in creating linkages between different economic agents.

Displaceability is also a mechanism that reaches far into the future and requires flexible adaptation to uncertainties yet to come caused

¹⁶ For the most recent issues of both publications see: Office of the United States Trade Representative, <https://ustr.gov/>

¹⁷ Oren Yiftachel, 'Displaceability - A Southeastern Perspective,' The Displacement Research and Action Network Blog (2018), <http://mitdisplacement.org/symposium-oren-yiftachel/>; Oren Yiftachel, 'From Displacement to Displaceability,' City 24, no. 1-2 (2020): 151-65.



Top: Roque Santeiro, Luanda, 2005
 Bottom: Gujari Bazaar, Ahmedabad, 2022

by the subjugating requirements of ever new places. Faced with long periods of political instability, the market of Roque Santeiro, situated on a former waste dump next to Luanda's port, played a central role in Angola's informal economy. With the onset of peace after 2002, the Angolan government announced a programme to restructure the local trade of 20,000 vendors, which involved relocating their operations from Roque Santeiro to purpose-built structures at a new market on the outskirts of the city. Development policies providing strict frameworks of economic cooperation have shaped the new market's spatial arrangement and vendors have either adapted to these measures of commercial re-organisation or have developed alternative lines of business, such as operating from their homes, renting small shops or reverting to street trade. While the market was able to survive as such, the relocation has led to a huge drop in sales because the originally more than 100,000 daily market customers do not travel to the outskirts to purchase goods and are thus no longer part of the formal-informal linkages that made the market thrive.

Inducing similar conditions of displaceability, the self-governed Gujari Bazaar on Ahmedabad's Sabarmati River has been under threat by plans for a transformational riverfront development and the replacement of the existing bazaar with a new marketplace aimed at higher income groups and foreign visitors. Gujari Bazaar has formed part of the riverbanks' centuries-old use as a commons, accommodating up to 1,000 additional ad-hoc traders who set up around adjacent dry channels in the riverbed. A significant part of Ahmedabad's living cultural heritage and the backbone of the city's informal economy, Gujari Bazaar has long been a vital site for the intersection of many urban communities and the establishment of relations across social class divides. The eviction of traders from their original location has been guided by entrepreneurial forms of urban governance and the repurposing of narratives of the market. While the dreamy visions of a Dubai-style riverfront have only partly been realised and the only half-completed redesign of public spaces now seems stuck in limbo, the uprooting of the old market has negatively impacted informal livelihoods and community networks to a significant extent. And yet despite the non-human scale of the riverfront redevelopment and the violence that engendered it, some segments of informal trade have managed to co-exist with fragmented spatial interventions and take up space in niches that have been preserved or newly created amid environmental regulation.

Promises and pitfalls of on-site infrastructural improvement

While in the case of market relocations resistance often arises from breaking with a tradition of places and milieus deemed worth preserving, development policies that aim at improving

existing marketplaces represent a subtler but sometimes equally contested way of intervening in linkages between the formal and informal. Again and again, urban development policies promise substantial improvements in the infrastructures of everyday life, including sites for all kinds of social and economic interaction such as squares, parks and marketplaces. Such policies suggest a win-win situation in which increased hygiene, order and tidiness will result in safer and more attractive neighbourhoods benefiting both vendors and visitors as well as the city and its economy as a whole. Typically, there is a whole range of spatial elements involved in implementing these measures: standardised market stalls and awnings, area markings, drainage systems, storage areas, roller shutters, transport aids, regulated opening times, and other elements that facilitate market activities. Such upgrades of the existing infrastructure of informal marketplaces are often associated with significant interventions in the complex processes, arrangements and liaisons that make up the tightly woven fabric of a market. This is equally relevant for the top-down restructuring of transnational trading hubs, private-public partnerships set up to absorb the informal vibe of a location, and the high-profile redesign of long-established marketplaces.

The most elementary form of improvement applied across multiple locations is the provision of a clearly regulated market environment for street vendors. The nature and direction of these regulations is set out in improvement policies, which usually go hand in hand with the reorganisation of administrative and policing powers, as well as with shifting regional and international economic alliances. As can be seen in markets as diverse as São Paulo's Feirinha da Madrugada, one of the largest distribution centres in Latin America for cheap goods imported mainly from Asia, Hong Kong's dawn markets and Dubai's long-standing Karama market, this shift of commerce from street vending to consolidated enterprises often involves periodic closures of the market and the standardisation of market facilities as well as an extension of policing powers to confiscate goods, all of which tends to push street trade into the surrounding areas. The redistribution of market access excludes those vendors for whom remaining in the market would no longer provide the necessary returns, whether because they can no longer afford the rent, because they are losing their particular role in the cooperative network, or because their old customers are no longer interested in visiting the new market.

Such forms of incorporation of informality critically intervene in the niches carved out by informal markets in big cities, be it interstitial spaces, underused infrastructures, or zones of transition. While providing some kind of spatial improvement, these interventions also replace particular operational milieus and exclude traders that are not compatible with the new environments. Rather than



Top: Karama Market, Dubai, 2023
Bottom: Skylight Market, Tin Shui Wai, Hong Kong, 2022



Els Encants, Barcelona, 2022

trying to avoid the congestion of daytime traffic as in the case of the big wholesale fairs in São Paulo, traders at Hong Kong's dawn markets, for instance, seek to operate outside the working hours of hawker-control teams. Catering to the city's elderly poor, vendors operate on a day-to-day basis, offering salvaged houseware, second-hand clothes and home-grown produce. Hong Kong's administration has launched initiatives to 're-site eligible hawkers into new public markets', the operational requirements of which exceed the resources of most dawn-market vendors. The spatial logics of these new public markets and their programmed community activities are also more in tune with the streamlining spirit of prevalent urban development schemes than with the actual lives of street vendors operating at the margins of the city. Such vendors' individual and collective capacities are less receptive to being integrated into proposed urban improvement schemes than to the proliferation of opportunities to make their own way in urban life.

Proliferation pertains to the coming together of different kinds of 'economic practices, demeanours, behavioural tactics, forms of social organisation, territory, and mobility' that generate new values and possibilities for what AbdouMaliq Simone and Vyjayanthi Rao identify as 'urban majorities', the practices and configurations that make 'the multitude of individual and collective lives of the poor, the working class, and the lower-middle class intersect with each



Arizona Market, Brčko, 2022

other, form intricate webs of interdependency and reciprocity.¹⁸ Such modes of mobilisation and collaboration are put under enormous pressure by recent tendencies to absorb the styles, energies and vulnerabilities of informal marketplaces into grand architectural gestures with which cities compete with each other for attention in the global competition of investment flows. The new design of Barcelona's centuries-old Encants Vells flea market, for instance, has been awarded numerous international prizes. Situated just across from its previous site, the new structure is part of a string of spectacular architectures lining one of the city's prime development axes and is embedded in the wider transformation of the surrounding working-class neighbourhood into a global investment destination. From Encants Vells' acclaimed new design in Barcelona to contested sites such as Dubai's Karama market and the transformation of its unassuming environment into a colourfully painted tourism hotspot, the far-reaching effects of architectural interventions in informal marketplaces are evident in a multitude of projects in which infrastructural and aesthetic improvement ties in with the spatial redevelopment of neighbourhoods through government-enticed real estate investment. In most such cases the replacement of existing housing stock with much pricier new homes and condominiums impacts not only the character of trade but also the formal-informal linkages and arrangements between the different actors who have collectively shaped a location with their activities.

¹⁸ AbdouMaliq Simone and Vyjayanthi Rao, 'Counting the Uncountable: Revisiting Urban Majorities,' *Public Culture* 33, no. 2 (2021): 152.



Top: Brooklyn Flea, Dumbo, New York, 2023
 Bottom: Talad Rot Fai, Bangkok, 2023

Incorporating the entrepreneurial energy of informal markets

One of the lessons to be learned from incorporations of informality is that improvement cuts both ways. Just as improvements in infrastructure, facilities and appearance are meant to ‘upgrade’ the operations of informal markets, so the formal economy is improved by incorporating the informal. Tainted assets and illicit transactions may not be part of this process of incorporation but other aspects of informality are readily appropriated: the availability of social ties, the creative energy of self-entrepreneurialism, the authentic appearance of informal aesthetics, and the lived experience of decentralised, malleable collaborations between different market actors. The measures used to appropriate the entrepreneurial potential of informal markets typically range from the wholesale privatisation of informal markets and their transformation into corporately managed shopping malls, as seen in the case of Arizona Market in post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina, to cultivating the emerging phenomenon of hipster markets, where a young urban crowd engages in more or less informal peer-to-peer exchange. With regard to the latter there have been numerous attempts to build trendy brands for ‘informal’ markets, such as Brooklyn Flea (New York) and Talad Rot Fai (Bangkok). In recent years such brands have gained increasing value as assets in the global competition for economic growth and future market share.

A pioneering example of the emergent wave of branded festival-like markets, the Brooklyn Flea in New York temporarily occupies former warehouses and empty lots. Many of the enterprises in this bohemian-style environment emerged in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis. We are now seeing a consolidation phase, in which businesses have begun to open up further branches or to distribute their wares via other channels. This brand-building deploys specific market aesthetics that allude to authenticity and community experience – locally sourced, home-baked, self-made – processes that illustrate the incorporation of ‘informal’ flavours as a strategic tool. While the management of these markets may be formalised in legal terms, there is far less certainty about the in/formality of outsourced operations and the working conditions of vendors.

Some of the hipster markets currently mushrooming in Bangkok point to a new development in this global battle over the exploitation of formal-informal linkages. Talad Rod Fai is a growing network of weekend night markets popular with Bangkok’s urban young and retails easy-to-consume entertainment in a retro-styled setting. The cultivation of this market environment, which has long been geared towards informal start-ups producing personalised goods and trendy street food, fosters a new kind of exchange economy, a lifestyle community shared by both vendors and buyers in which business activities and enjoyment become seemingly

interchangeable. There is an emergent global cultural vocabulary of informality, manifested in both the physical expression and the economic conduct of this new type of market environment. It includes highly evocative arrangements of colourful tents nestled inside industrial structures, well-staged workshops that ooze an atmosphere of Old World craftsmanship, and super-sized displays of out-of-place artefacts, collectibles and ephemera. The purpose of these installations is not to satisfy any kind of functional need but to act as markers of improvisation, mobility and a good life. The deceitful furnishing of these spaces enacts both a sense of belonging and displacement, depending on one's context and capacity for keeping up with the adaptive processes of urban transformation. It assigns distinct roles to different actors in a frontier culture fuelled by an eclectic mix of financial speculation, logistical coordination, and urban mood-board design.

Reconfiguring the urban

Cities and their accelerating engagement of capital, technologies and human creativity are the central sites determining the global economic and political order of the twenty-first century. They offer a platform for a diversity of people to take advantage of some of the opportunities emerging in changing urban contexts. Providing the framework for likely and unlikely encounters, informal markets have always played an important role in these processes of urban collaboration and exchange. Significantly, though, conflicts around the use of urban space by informal markets often serve as a primary pretext for spatial policy interventions that aim to regulate these kinds of transactions. Although such encroachments on self-regulation usually serve as governmental means of control, these interventions can also provide arenas of negotiation where different actor constellations and new forms of civic participation can emerge.

In the face of today's multiple crises, informality is seen by many as a lifeline, whether as a means of relieving hardship and securing one's livelihood or as a way of identifying and tapping into unexploited economic potential and fuelling even more urban speculation. In both cases, the formal and the informal blur into new configurations of the urban: amalgamations of neoliberal urban renewal and informal market activity, online trading and urban infrastructure, street food culture and urban food production, platform labour and the gig economy produce complex geographies in which experiments with deep entanglements between the formal and informal constitute critical sites of city-making. This laboratory of the city yet to come is defined by the affinities, intersections, struggles and tensions between formal and informal urban practices that feed off one another while at the same time undermining each other's presence. These ambiguous dynamics open up the question of urban development to changing patterns of formal-informal

linkages and the government policies and socio-economic realities that inform them.

Linking fluctuating formal-informal ties to the broader dynamics of a neoliberalisation from below, authors such as Verónica Gago, in her depiction of an emerging 'assemblage economy', have stressed the inscription of 'fractal accumulation' into the market space,¹⁹ – the way people adapt to the mindset of neoliberal ideals and incorporate corresponding patterns of economic conduct into their daily lives. Different types of capture and enclosure pave the way for connecting these processes to experiments with reconfiguring the urban. The construction of market halls, designated stalls, regulated operating hours and administrative structures, for instance, guarantee a level of continuity and integration for market vendors, but such enclosures also enable the siphoning off of time, creativity and potential via organised access to atomised productivity. This kind of reconfiguration is reflected not least in the current rise of e-commerce platforms and the way in which the COVID-19 pandemic has expanded in/formal market operations of all kinds into the digital realm. Blurring the boundaries between social media activities, urban engagement and online trade, the actuation of more dynamic and hybrid formal-informal economic arrangements brings to the fore new possibilities as well as forms of exploitation arising from this amalgamated top-down/bottom-up urban landscape.²⁰

Whatever agency one has in such environments, in/formal markets play a critical role in reconfigurations of the urban by acting as infrastructural nodes, both in a material and immaterial sense, providing access to goods, services, know-how, networks and all the things that different actors need to make a life worth living. From both a neoliberal perspective and that of many formal sector actors, the most attractive achievement of informal marketplaces is thus the creation of new market environments – places for trade and commerce that offer opportunities for economic empowerment and growth. The spatial and architectural presence of the market is what links informal trade to urban speculation. The marketplace itself constitutes the most critical linkage between small-scale entrepreneurial activity and global real estate operations. For many investors and developers, their attention and speculative interest is not so much focused on the concrete workings of a market per se, but on its potential value for attracting global capital to a particular neighbourhood, city or region. By transforming the potential of marketplaces into an asset class, individual ways of being in the city and engaging with the future through urban citizenship are thus inevitably tied up with urban speculation and global capital flows.

One of the ensuing problems is that today in/formal marketplaces are not only experiencing increasing pressure from state and corporate actors, but the orientation of this pressure is changing as well. Informality is being changed from a deficiency that needs to be fixed into a question of management, not only in terms of managing informality but also in terms of informality becoming a way of managing social and economic relations. This is reflected in a shift in debates on informality, with the focus now less on the political economy of informality than on opportunities to informally manage the relations between different civic and economic actors. Epitomised by the on-demand labour model of the platform economy and corresponding forms of urban government by experiment, this shift devalues the political potential inherent in informality and turns it into a vehicle for opening up new markets. Along with the rampant privatisation of urban space, the political space of informality is being fragmented and transformed into easily controllable and manageable environments of informal domesticity.

Digital technologies and data analysis are gradually being utilised to harness and exploit the unruly nature of informality for uneven growth and profit-making. However, it is uncertain whether the many leakages, spills, and incidents that emerge within the social ecologies of informality can be fully controlled and contained by agreements solely focused on exploiting their inherent potential. This uncertainty is apparent not only in the struggles of informal workers as they fight for their rights to the city but also in the ceaseless appropriation and transformation of top-down implemented infrastructures into environments that can accommodate the urban realities of highly agonistic relationships permeated by formal-informal hybridities. Urban majorities are both used to and dependent on inhabiting such kinds of relationships. In contrast to the objective of making informality quantifiable, predictable and available, both activist urban practice and academic analysis should thus strive not to make informality more productive and profitable but to strengthen our understanding of the complexity of its dynamics and the reciprocity of influences and possibilities inherent in formal-informal linkages. Understanding urban reconfiguration in this way means acknowledging that the tension between formal and informal spaces is not a marginal issue affecting only urban peripheries, but a fundamental dynamic that applies to any urban setting.

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A FORCED CLOSURE

A1 Cherkizovsky Market
A2 Saphan Lek Market
A3 La Salada Fair

Moscow
Bangkok
Buenos Aires

B RELOCATION

B1 Dajabón Binational Market
B2 Roque Santeiro
B3 Gujari Bazaar

Dajabón
Luanda
Ahmedabad

C IMPROVEMENT

C1 Karama Market
C2 Tin Shui Wai Dawn Market
C3 Encants Vells

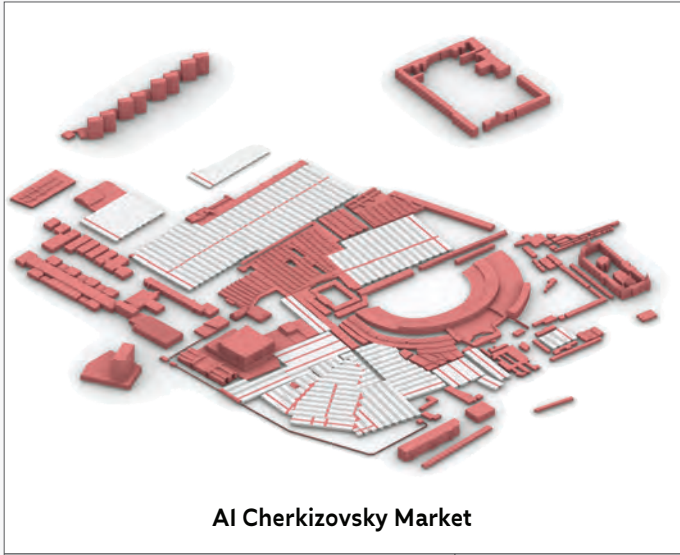
Dubai
Hong Kong
Barcelona

D APPROPRIATION

D1 Arizona Market
D2 Brooklyn Flea
D3 Talad Rot Fai

Brčko
New York
Bangkok

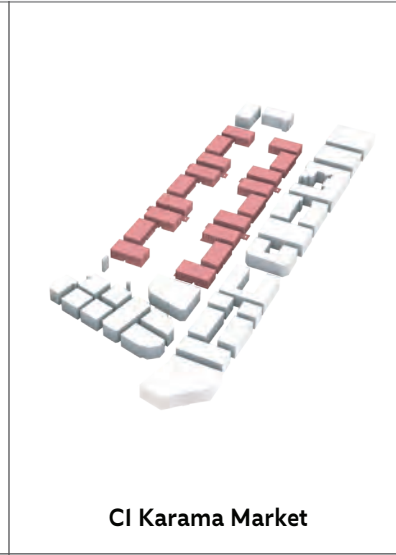




AI Cherkizovsky Market



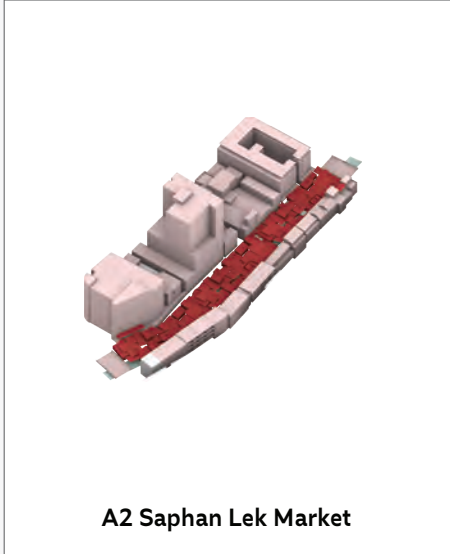
BI Dajabón Binational Market



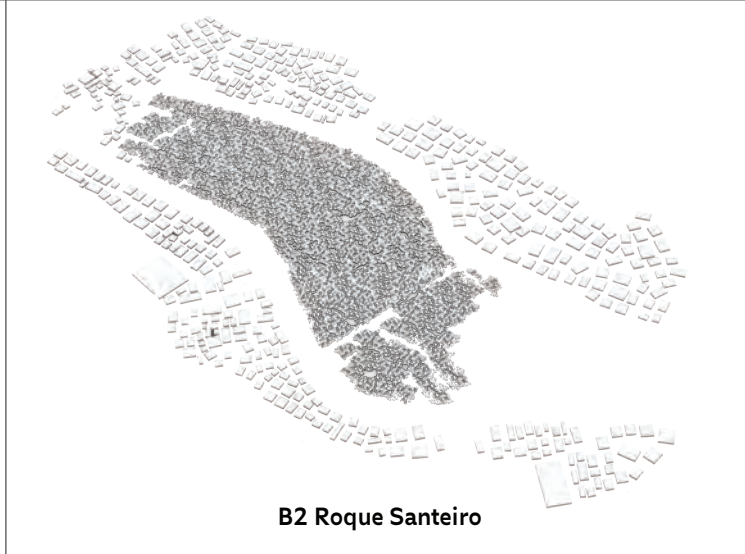
CI Karama Market



DI Arizona Market



A2 Saphan Lek Market



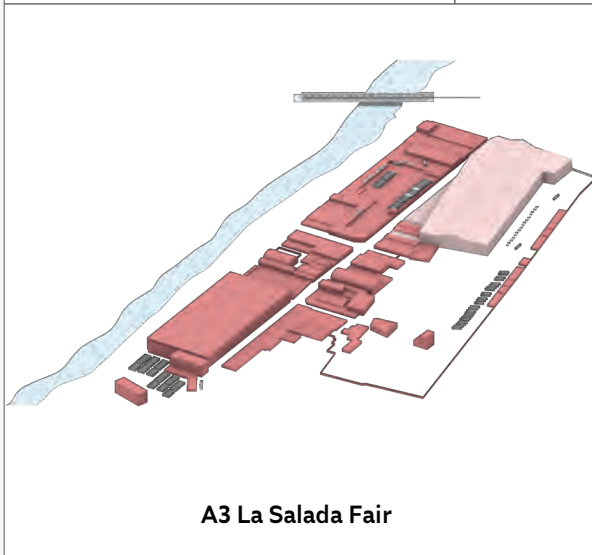
B2 Roque Santeiro



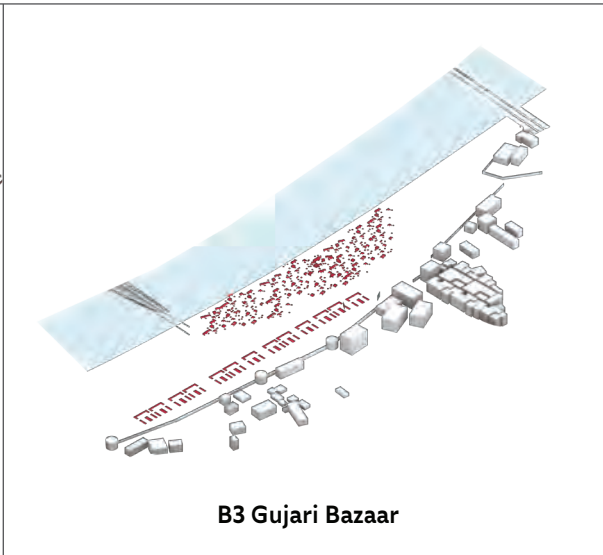
C2 Tin Shui Wai Dawn Market



D2 Brooklyn Flea



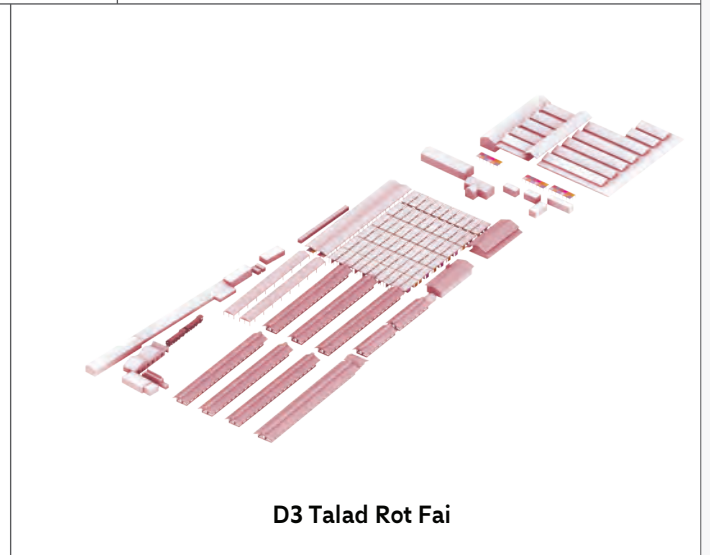
A3 La Salada Fair



B3 Gujari Bazaar

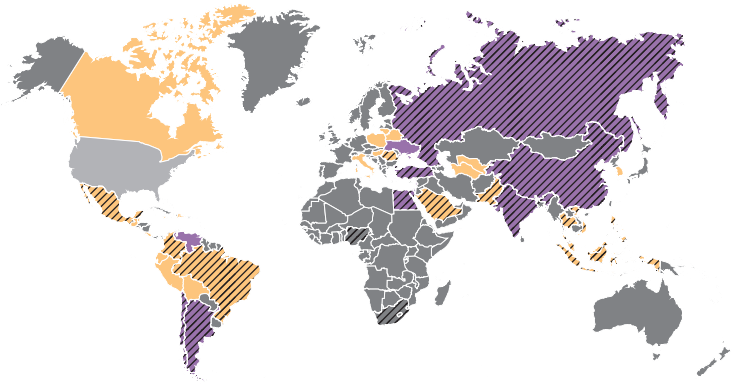


C3 Encants Vells



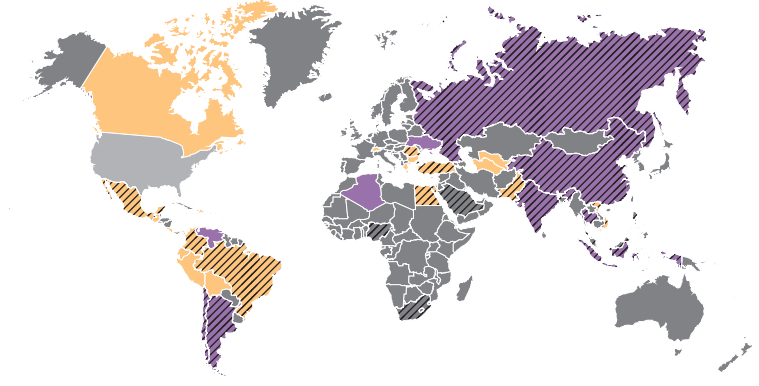
D3 Talad Rot Fai

2007



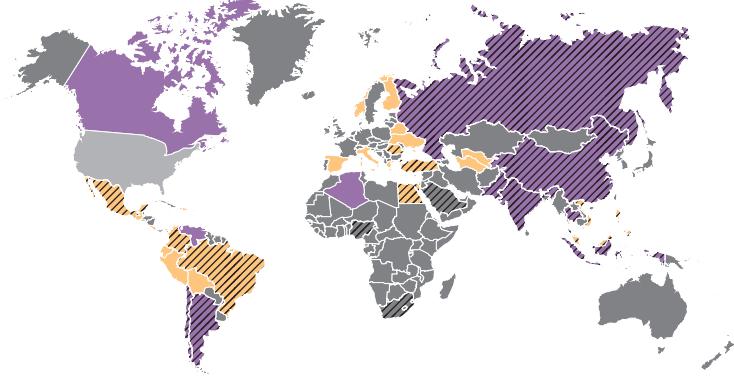
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2016



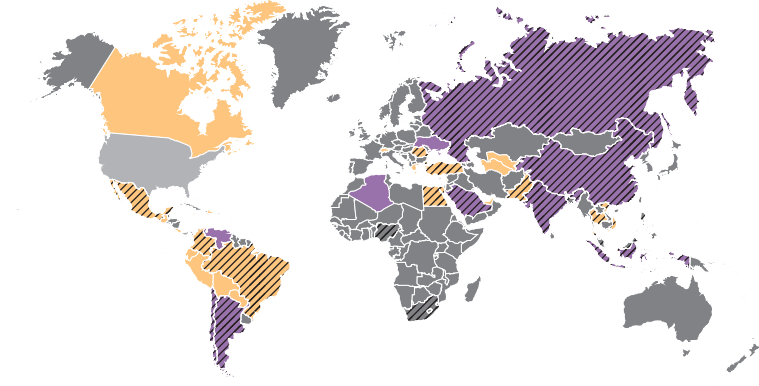
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2010



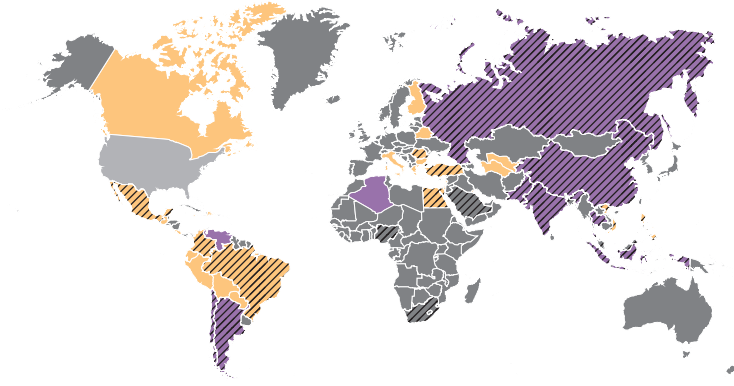
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2019



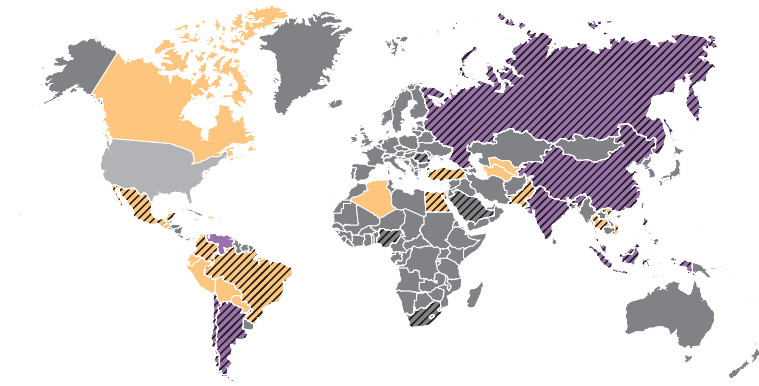
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2013

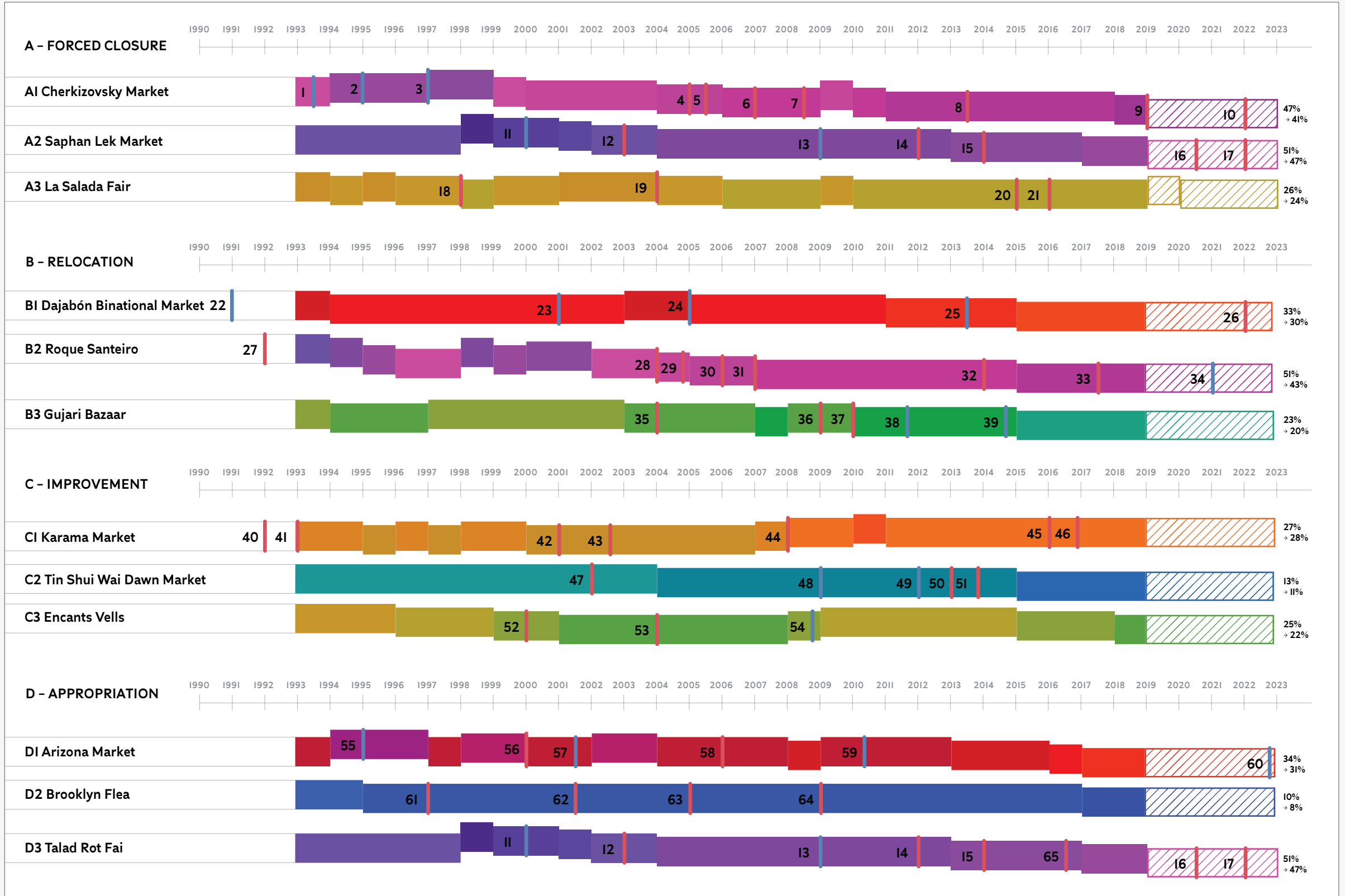


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2022



PRIORITY WATCH LIST: Argentina, Chile, China, India, Indonesia, Russia, Venezuela
WATCH LIST: Algeria, Barbados, Bolivia, Brazil, Canada, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, Guatemala, Mexico, Pakistan, Paraguay, Peru, Thailand, Trinidad and Tobago, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Vietnam



Interventions into informal marketplaces: timelines of policies targeting informal trade and the changing size of the informal economy

Estimates of informal output (percentage of total GDP, 1993-2018; source: World Bank)



Restricting policies towards informal markets (red line) Accommodating policies towards informal markets (blue line)

A FORCED CLOSURE

- 1 Cherkizovsky Market vendors start importing their goods using the 'grey customs clearance'.
- 2 Law (de)regulating street trade and markets passed
- 3 Approval of plans to expand the Cherkizovsky Market
- 4 State-led investigation of the Cherkizovsky Market
- 5 Crackdown on informal markets
- 6 Vladimir Putin approves plans to ban foreigners from trading at open-air markets.
- 7 Policies introduced to ban all open-air markets
- 8 Beginning of investigations and raids to reduce criminality at the Sadovod Shopping Complex
- 9 Raids in Sadovod, Lyublino and Food City targeting foreign workers
- 10 Russia plans to increase taxes for e-commerce.
- 11 Governor Sundaravej authorises the establishment of 353 new designated areas, accommodating 11,438 vendors. Additionally, restrictions on designated non-vending days are removed.
- 12 Governor Kasayodhin initiates a comprehensive city-wide clean-up campaign aimed at restoring order to street vending. The campaign includes targeted enforcement actions against street vendors in markets lacking proper regulation, such as Bo Bae and Khlong Thom markets.
- 13 Governor Paribatra introduces a series of policies that demonstrate strong support for street vendors. These include a proposal to authorise an additional 275 designated vending areas to accommodate 6,749 vendors. The 'Street Vending as the City's Charm' project and a soft loans policy for licensed vendors are implemented.
- 14 Under the administration of Governor Sukhum-bhand, a shift towards more stringent regulation on street vending occurs. Each district's administration is instructed to restrict and control the number of available vending spots.
- 15 Public space cleanup programme led by the BMA comes into effect following the military coup.
- 16 The Khlong Ong Ang Walking Street project estimated at a cost of 275 million baht is completed.
- 17 BMA begins with another round of street clean-ups.
- 18 A severe economic crisis in Argentina leads to high unemployment and increase in informal economic activities.
- 19 Stalls added along the river in 2001 are evicted in the midst of violent clashes resulting in one vendor's death.
- 20 The new government increases attempts to reduce the size of the informal sector.
- 21 The increasing criminalisation of La Salada Fair reflects a change in attitude towards the 'popular economy'.

B RELOCATION

- 22 Opening of borders between Haiti and the Dominican Republic (DR) as part of efforts to promote cross-border trade
- 23 Law 28-01: Special Border Development Zone Law passed to promote economic development and social integration in the border region
- 24 European Union agrees to financially support the building of a new market hall for the Binational Market in Dajabon.
- 25 Opening of the new market building in Dajabon
- 26 Start of a 160 km-long 'intelligent' border fence project
- 27 The first land law (Lei de Terras) confers the state with authority over agricultural land and paves the path for the involvement of private investors.
- 28 A new land law (Law no. 09/04) mandates landowners to undergo an official registration process for their land before the designated deadline in 2010. Failure to comply would result in the transfer of ownership of any unregistered land in Angola to the state.
- 29 The government implements a strategy aimed at regaining control over urban space and eradicating the *musseques*.
- 30 The Angolan government initiates PRESILD (Programme of Structuring the System of Logistics and Distribution of Essential Products to the Population) which seeks to formalise and restructure the commercial supply network.
- 31 The implementation of the Law of Housing Development introduces a provision enabling the state to demolish constructions deemed 'inappropriate'.
- 32 The government announces a regime of heavy fines targeting not only informal vendors but also their customers.
- 33 Measures against informality culminate in 'Operation Resgate' with arrests and heavy fines against informal vendors.
- 34 The government embraces a transformative approach, known as the Informal Economy Transition Programme (PREI), which marks a departure from the 'Operation Resgate' strategy, which aimed to eliminate the informal economy but proved ineffective.
- 35 The Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation (AMC) launches the Sabarmati Riverfront Development Project, envisioning the transformation of the riverfront as an opportunity to attract global investment.
- 36 Sabarmati Riverfront Development Corporation demolishes most of the informal settlements along the riverbanks.
- 37 An eviction notice is served to the Gujarati Bazaar vendors.
- 38 Public Interest Litigation filed by Navdeep Mathur, a professor at Ahmedabad's Indian Institute of Management, argues for the inclusion of Gujarati Bazaar in the Sabarmati Riverfront Development Project.
- 39 Gujarati Bazaar officially relocates to its new premises within the Sabarmati riverfront redevelopment.

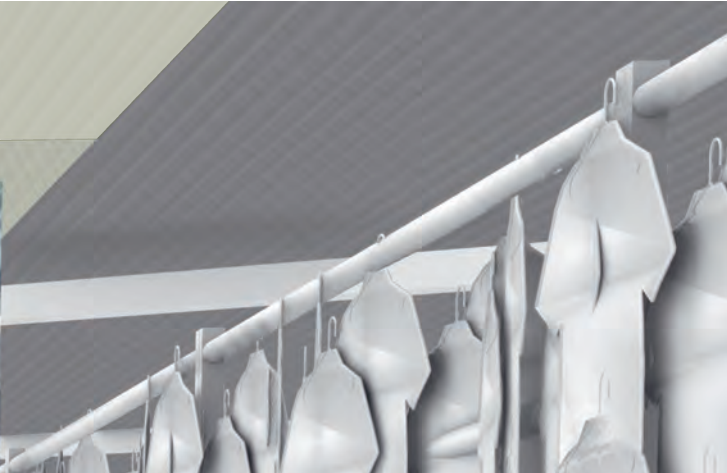
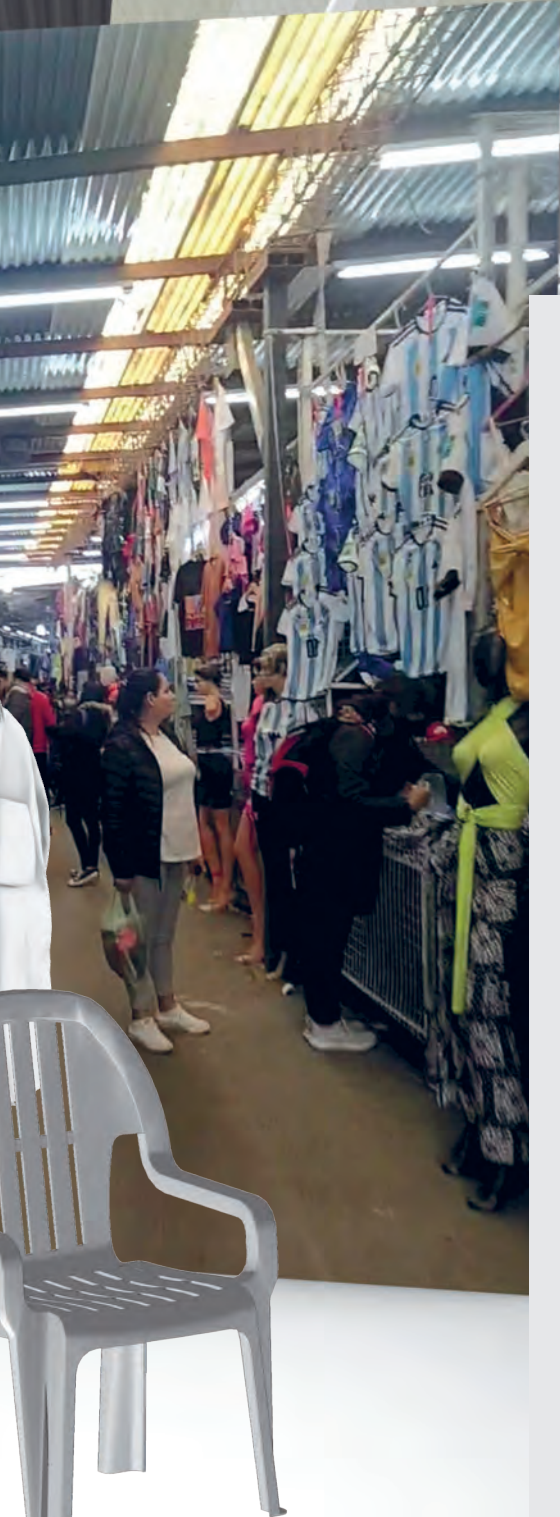
C IMPROVEMENT

- 40 The Dubai government establishes the Dubai Economic Department (DED) as the regulatory body responsible for enforcing intellectual property rights and combating counterfeit trade.
- 41 Introduction of the first federal trademark law (Law no. 37/1992) in the UAE
- 42 DED announces that shops in Karama Market have two weeks to sell any remaining illicit stock before the imposition of heavy fines and unannounced raids.
- 43 Amendment of the federal trademark law to meet international standards and criteria
- 44 Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum issues Law no. 25/2008 giving the DED the responsibility for planning and regulating the overall economic performance of Dubai, supervise its functions and enhance economic development.
- 45 Introduction of the Anti-Commercial Fraud Law (Law no. 19/2016) increases the fines for counterfeiting and introduces prison sentences.
- 46 DED introduces measures against online counterfeiting.
- 47 A programme lasting for five years is introduced, urging itinerant hawkers to willingly give up their licenses. In return, they are offered various incentives, including a single, one-time *ex gratia* payment, the option to rent an empty stall in public markets under favourable terms, or the opportunity to become a fixed pitch hawker selling non-cooked food. As a result of this initiative, there is a significant reduction in the number of licensed hawkers.
- 48 A batch of new licenses is issued after a review of the hawker licensing policy was implemented.
- 49 The Tung Wah Group of Hospitals (TWGH), a non-profit local Non-Government Organisation (NGO), puts forward a proposal to the government to establish a market that would offer affordable rental stalls for street traders and TSW residents. This initiative would enable them to earn a livelihood by selling daily food, groceries, and other goods. The primary goals of this plan are described as increasing shopping options for the community, generating employment opportunities for disadvantaged groups, providing street traders with legitimate and proper stalls for conducting business, and ultimately replacing the informal 'dawn' markets.
- 50 The government offers lump sums of 120,000 HK dollars to hawkers who are willing to surrender their licenses. More than 310 licenses are forfeited in one year.
- 51 The Hong Kong Government implements an assistance scheme in 43 fixed-pitch hawker areas starting June 2013 to reduce the fire risks and enhance the operating environment of the hawker areas.
- 52 Inception of 22@ – a smart city government initiative introduced with the intention to make Barcelona a hub for innovative technology companies. 22@ uses the adjacent neighbourhood of Poblenou as a testbed for design-led economic growth.
- 53 The first Universal Forum of Cultures takes place and is hosted in buildings that started a wave of high-profile architectures along Avenida Diagonal such as the Forum Building by Herzog & de Meuron, the Parc dels Auditoris by Foreign Office Architects (FOA) and the Torre Agbar by Jean Nouvel.
- 54 Barcelona City Council announces a European competition for the construction of a market complex that should become the new permanent home of Encants Vells.

D APPROPRIATION

- 55 Informal roadside vendors cluster next to a checkpoint on Arizona Route; tolerated by the international community (OHR, OSCE, UNMIBH, SFOR) these operations soon expand into adjacent fields with fixed stalls forming the first Arizona Market.
- 56 The international community's Office of the High Representative raises concerns about the steep rise in illicit activities and commits to ridding the market of these problems.
- 57 The Supervisor of the Brčko District invites tenders from private enterprises for building and operating a new and improved Arizona Market.
- 58 Introduction of new tax rates for the Brčko District and the Arizona Market in accordance with the rest of BiH (prior to this, the district was granted favourable taxation)
- 59 The Brčko District Assembly claims negligence in the running and development of the market by Italproject and awards its sole management to another enterprise, Santovac.
- 60 Initially planned beginning of the expansion of Arizona Market
- 61 A special type of zoning called 'Mixed-use District Zoning' is introduced to attract investment and enhance the vitality of existing neighbourhoods in NYC.
- 62 The Bloomberg Administration introduces a major zoning initiative known as the New York City Zoning Resolution of 2002.
- 63 Rezoning: Williamsburg transitions to mixed-use district zoning.
- 64 Rezoning: Dumbo transitions to mixed-use district zoning.
- 65 The eviction of street vendors from Bangkok's city centre contributes to making private and temporary market ventures more profitable than ever.





From nomadic labour to online services and from street food kitchens to pop-up shops, informality is on the rise as never before. Its transformative power can be seen in the new ways we produce, consume and live, with commerce playing a crucial role in these changes. The resulting tension between the formal and the informal is nowhere more evident than in the struggles over contested marketplaces.

This book provides a deeper understanding of the formal-informal linkages that have given shape to some of the world's largest and most unique open-air marketplaces. Its rich and engaging visual analyses of markets in cities such as Bangkok, Buenos Aires, Dubai and New York reveal the hidden connections between informal trade, neoliberal governance and urban development.



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