

Informal Governance in Urban Spaces: Power, Negotiation and Resistance among Georgian Street Vendors

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Drawing on evidence from the competition for public spaces between street vendors and the authorities in Georgia our contribution through this article is two-fold. First, we provide empirical evidence showing the diverse role of informality in a series of settings, and its capacity to influence decision and policy making. Second, we explore the relationship between informality and power (and in particular the policy-making process) to go beyond a legality-illegality binary. Our goal is to show the influence that informality has on governance at the local but also national level. In particular, by mapping the various sources and expressions of power, informality is shown and conceptualized as a space where formal institutions and citizens (or informal institutions) compete for power, where certain aspects and mechanisms that regulate public life in a given area are played out. The importance of such a space of informal negotiation is shown to be vital in contexts where none of the two ideal types of social responses to policy problems - exit or voice options- are available.

Keywords: Georgia, informality, power, public life, state-citizen, street vendors

INTRODUCTION: BETWEEN INFORMALITY AND THE LAW

Studies on the relationship between informal practices and the law have been informed by two opposing positions. On the one hand informality has often been perceived as unlawful practices undermining the functioning of a state and acting against rules and codes regulating a polity. There seems to be an understanding that, whilst agency can be seen as positive in some debates, excessive agency undermines the “claim of objectivity” of a system (Davies and Polese, 2015; Morris and Polese,

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2015). On the other side of the spectrum we have a range of positions *de facto* justifying informality or at least exploring the rationale behind informal practices. Anthropologists have concentrated on the meaning of informality, explaining that it runs through non-economic and non-market channels (Gudeman, 2001, Parry and Bloch, 1989, Uribnoyev and Svensson, 2013). An intermediate position explores the relationship between the licit/illicit and legality/illegality (Van Schendel and Abrahams, 2005) and suggests that informality can be defined as that area of activities not regulated by the state (Ledeneva, 2013; Polese et al, 2014; 2015; Routh, 2011).

This article suggests that informality creates a space where laws are renegotiated according to ever changing power relations. This brings about a few consequences. First, informality is a space, in the geographical meaning of the term where face-to-face encounter of street-level bureaucrat and unemployed can become a temporary space of informal governance. Space is conceived as folded into social relations through practical activities (Harvey, 1996), where space undergoes continual reconstruction as a result of the agency of things encountering each other. Space is no longer a fixed and absolute container, where things are passively embedded, but as a coproduction of those proceedings, as a process in process and this is more proper to understand the evolution of informal practices (Thrift, 2009). We are closer to the nomadism and mobility as space of resistance envisaged by Hardt and Negri (2000, 158, 212): between voice and exit there is a kind of 'refusal' in space and time (458, note 16).

Recent trends of informality research depict it as a myriad of (economic, social and cultural) practices spread on a spectrum between the legal, the extra-legal and illegal, some of which cause direct harm to fellow citizens while others undermine the state as institution or its symbolic power and others may be regarded not only as non-harmful but even as positive, allowing an organisation or a state to perform its function more effectively and efficiently (Morris, 2011, 2012a; Polese, 2014; 2015). This vision has the advantage of moving away from the overly-economistic focus that a number of works have pursued and this is why informality can be regarded as 'positive', normative even, in a state optic. Where a practice conceals a revenue or an economic activity, there is 'no excuse' for informality since, at least normatively, all the economic transactions of a society must converge towards the state that is the ultimate regulator of the economic life of a country. Under this view, it is possible to justify an unregistered economic practice only in two cases: when the state is so ineffective that there is no other way to perform an economic activity (new institutionalism), or when the state forgets or forgoes regulation of a particular aspect of the society's life (modernism and/or ultra-liberalism). In both cases informality may be seen as transitional, that is in place only as long as a state is not effective. We shall argue here that informality may be seen as transitional in its form but not in its meaning. An informal practice may be liquidated in its form but informality will stay.

In addition, this approach to informality allows us to go beyond the universalistic/particularistic dichotomy. In our case study we document the use of informality by a particular category of people (street vendors) in a particular context (Georgia). But the modalities and dynamics of informality in Georgia, while particular, can be generalised to wider contexts of bureaucrat-informal practice encounters in space. What we maintain, however, is that informality as a phenomenon is present in all societies, as connected to agency and socialisation tendencies. Therefore, whilst the way informality expresses itself may be unique, the fact that power relations are regulated through informality allows us to use this case to dialogue with a larger geographical scope and compare the ways informality is perpetuated and embedded in social relations in a variety of different contexts.

There is still limited understanding of the arena between an informal *practice* and a socially and politically relevant *movement* (Polese and Kevlihan, 2015) but when informality takes such shape that we need to take it into account in policy making we can talk of informal governance. There are some similarities with the concept of real governance but also one fundamental difference. Real governance seeks to go beyond a normative understanding of power to identify and explore the actors that participate in the construction of the policy processes on a given territory (Boege et al., 2009; Haggmann and Péclard, 2010; Williams, 2005; Williams et. al., 2011). Informal governance is not concerned with identifying the actors since it starts from the position examining the symbolic order of a state and allocation of power; it is more interested in the dynamics and actions that both sustain and disrupt a bureaucratic organization. Thus for example, a legal requirement for the unemployed to prove they are looking for work frequently may result in informal collusion between bureaucrats and the jobless in accepting dubious documentary evidence of job seeking. This would be de facto informal governance.

When a given decision-making institution issues a new rule or law it is likely to encounter resistance or questioning by the 'decision takers' on the ground or 'street-level bureaucrats', as well as those citizens on the receiving end of policy. Previous work in anthropology has assumed that those excluded by the decision making process may challenge it through informal mechanisms (Gupta, 2005) that are either uncoordinated (Scott, 1985) or involve mass participation (Scott, 1976). Recent works on social movements illustrate the way citizens engage with contentious politics to challenge, question or reject decisions that are deemed harmful for them (Della Porta, 2006; Tarrow, 2005). However, the grey zone between these two foci has remained largely unexplored (Bayat, 2006; Hirschmann, 1970). We refer here to the space between unorganised resistance, individually conceived and carried out by members of a community – or citizens – with little awareness of – or even interest in – similar actions and the gathering of a substantial amount of members of a given (social or political) movement that challenges, nationally or transnationally, a given decision by the authorities. This is to focus on the space in between the two

ideal type societal responses elaborated by Hirschman, namely exit (withdrawal) and voice (collective mobilisation).

What is the tipping point between an uncoordinated *moment* of resistance that may be dealt with case by case individually and a *movement* of significance that policy makers need to reckon with it through formal mechanisms? Individualized rejection and avoidance of tax compliance is something relatively well known. People are treated and punished for failing to comply with tax regulations. But when a moment, perhaps having a moral or political basis – like objection to the use of tax takes for a contentious policy goal – takes such a significance that courts can no longer deal with them, or become widely supported by a substantial portion of a country's population then an action has to be taken and a new rule introduced. In such case, it could be opportune to say that informal resistance has influenced policy making. There are a few ways this can happen as documented by the Figure 1 (Polese, 2016) below.

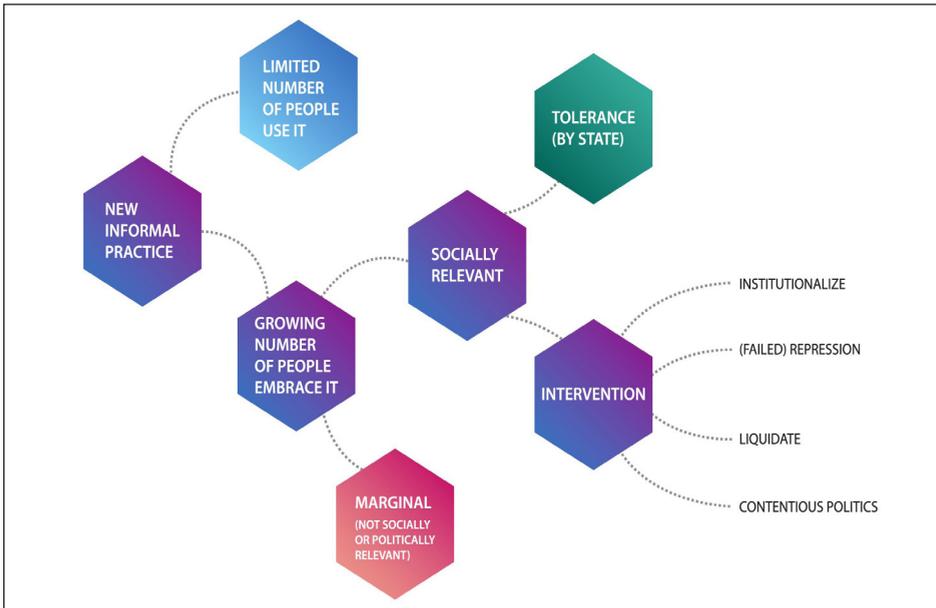


Figure 1: Evolution of informal practice

The figure shows that once a new practice is born to complement formal rules, it is initially carried out by a limited number of people, so it is ignored by the state. It does not matter whether the practice is legal or illegal; what matters is the cost of repression. After a certain time, a number of people might find it convenient to act according to the informal rule (in spite of the state or beyond the state). The practice can remain very marginal in a society, and thus is not worthy of attention. If the number of people engaging is irrelevant to the state, or the socio-economic

damage is considered irrelevant, the informal practice will be tolerated. However, if it involves a large number of people or interferes with powerful interests it will become a policy issue and a formal intervention mechanism will be set up. At least four scenarios are possible to envisage:

1. Institutionalisation: the authorities “buy” the practice. Under the understanding that this is, or is going to be, a major societal need in the coming years, the state either replaces informal rules or opens the way to the private sector by establishing regulatory mechanisms to allow private initiative in the management of the practice.
2. Contentious: The authorities try to repress it, but the practice persists, and people start confronting the authorities (contentious politics), claiming that it is their right to engage in such a practice. This might lead to a new set of policies addressing that need.
3. Liquidation. The state convinces a substantial number of people not to engage in such a practice. This is likely to happen through a combination of positive and negative incentives, respectively prizing those not engaging with the practice while punishing those engaging with it.
4. Failed repression: The attempts to regulate or liquidate the practice fail. The practice might be so deeply rooted in the society that political will is not met by will at the local level (instructions are given to tackle the problem, but those in charge of doing so locally either disagree or understand they will lose support if they do so). At this point the practice either stays in limbo – it is officially illegal but widely accepted – or is promoted to a formal rule.

Scenario 2 and 4 open the way to a further option that is insurgency. It has been suggested that a particularly successful case of self-governing civil society or non-state actors regulating to a certain extent a given territory may try to gain more autonomy and feed insurgency movements and organisations (Kevilhan, 2011). The Georgian case, although following scenario 2 and scenario 4, cannot be seen to go so far. However, the competition for regulation of public spaces generates tensions that it is possible to solve only through informal mechanisms, as the case study below illustrates.

The empirical material discussed in this article comes from the repeated ethnographic fieldworks conducted throughout 2012-2014 in Tbilisi, the capital city of Georgia. Georgia is uniquely well situated to study the role of informal governance, particularly within the post-soviet region. On the one hand, similar to many other post-soviet states, Georgia witnessed general “informalisation of the state” (Rasanayagam, 2011) throughout the 1990s. On the other hand, Georgia was the only country in the immediate neighbourhood that succeeded in curbing petty-corruption and in genuinely reforming and strengthening the state institutions in the second decade of transformation (Engvall, 2012). As this article will demonstrate, the process of formalization of the state society relationships often drew on the informal forms of governance and negotiation. The role of the informal govern-

ance was crucial for translating the new formal rules and regulations to the affected social groups on the street level, but also, for creating a form of feedback mechanism between citizens and the government.

The fieldwork explored the resistance of the petty traders against the privatization of publicly owned bazaars and restrictions over trading in public spaces. Ethnographic observations, informal interviews, group discussions and semi-structured interviews involved a few groups present at trading sites in Tbilisi: [1] petty traders that rented pitches inside privately owned bazaars or shopping-centres; [2] illegal street vendors and street-peddlers; [3] police officers; [4] supervisors assigned by Tbilisi city hall to enforce regulations against street vending; [5] administration of bazaars and shopping-centres. One of the centrally located and important shopping spaces for the city, Deserter's Bazaar and the surrounding territory, served as a key and the most regular fieldwork site. While the Deserter's Bazaar has been important to Tbilisi city culture already in Soviet times (Khutsishvili, 2012), the 1990s saw the expansion of the trading sites around the bazaar. Currently, a few blocks in between Deserter's bazaar and Tbilisi Railway station are populated by the grocery markets of different sizes, shopping malls, kiosks, currency exchange shops, street vendors, and peddlers. By 2012, at the beginning of this fieldwork, the Deserter's bazaar was under reconstruction. Many of the traders previously working there had either turned into street vendors and peddlers, or found shelter in other/smaller bazaars nearby. When the Deserter's bazaar reopened by 2013, the new owners found a difficult and a lengthy process to attract back the traders. Besides, the semi-central trading sites of the city, such as the areas around Metro Delisi and Metro Didube, the peripheral sites, such as the surroundings of Metro Akhmeteli, and the central avenues of the city, Rustaveli avenue and Melikishvili avenue were visited regularly in scope of the fieldwork. Observation of different vending/trading sites was crucial to understand the spatial dynamics of policy implementation and revealed the Georgian government's particular attention to the central districts of the city. However, throughout 2012 the government was attempting to curb vending in semi-central and peripheral areas as in the central ones. With the change of the government in 2013, the control started relatively relaxing. At this point, the semi-central and peripheral areas were the first to witness increase in the quiet encroachment of the street vendors.

While direct observation is constrained to the fieldwork years (2012-2014), relying on ethnographic and semi-structured interviews and limited available literature and media reports on petty trade, the empirical material discusses the transformation of the petty traders' struggles throughout the last decade. On the one hand, it traces the changing governmental strategies of approaching—suppressing or tolerating—informal petty trade. On the other hand, empirical investigation is concerned with diverse tactics pursued by petty traders, especially the illegally operating vendors, at negotiating their access to trading in public spaces. Finally, and most importantly, the meeting point of state strategies and traders' tactics, or the space created through

the power contestations— informal negotiation of the rules between traders and street-level officials and informal interventions by the officials— is examined.

The fieldwork focused on various vending and small trade sites in Tbilisi, the capital city of Georgia. These included semi peripheral as well as peripheral sites, often nearby the metro stations (such as Didube, Delisi and Akhmeteli) as well as main avenues of the city (Rustaveli and Melikishvili avenues). However, the surroundings of the centrally located grocery market place, called Deserter’s bazaar was the main fieldwork site for this research (Figure 2). Deserter’s bazaar is located nearby the central train station and has been an important shopping point since the Soviet times. Starting in early 1990s the amount of traders as well as new trading centres and smaller grocery markets have proliferated in the few blocks located in between the Deserter’s bazaar, the railway station and Dinamo football stadium. The location offers a unique but also quite a confusing mix of differentially modernised trading points: bazaars – open or semi-open grocery markets; bazrobas – also open and semi-open trading points for garments, textiles, diverse household appliances; shopping centres (in Georgian - *savachro centri*) resembling more western style shopping malls, cash exchange points, small shops, second-hand garment’s shops and most importantly, street vendors filling up the streets, sidewalks and parks in between these diverse shopping places. The rest of the paper offers a condensed analysis of how the local social orders as well as spatial practices have been transforming alongside the state level institutional changes at this trading sites.

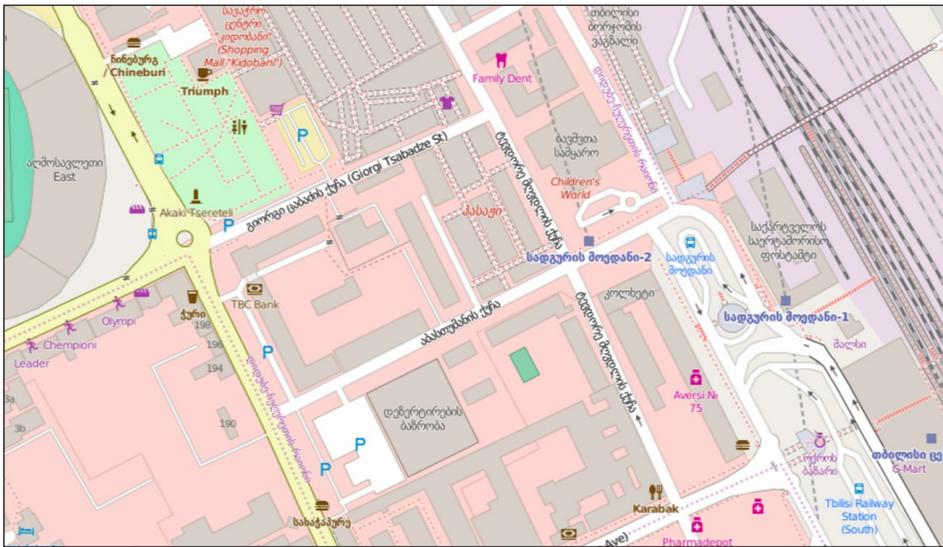


Figure 2: Tbilisi Deserter’s Bazaar

POWER AND SYMBOLICS OF GEORGIAN PETTY TRADERS

The case of Georgian petty traders and street vendors is revealing in understanding the role of informal governance at the points when [1] informal practices and institutions become politically relevant, hence subjected to the state intervention and, [2] when neither exit nor voice options serve as viable solutions for the social group targeted by the policy. In the case of Georgia, informal open-air and street trade was *tolerated* by the government throughout the 1990s. From the mid-2000s however the government decided to *repress* informal trade by making it illegal and attempting to eliminate the practice. This gave way to a decade long *contestation* period (scenario 2) when the traders and vendors resisted new regulations and attempted to influence policy making through firstly openly and collectively expressing their political voice and later, by engaging in informal resistance and negotiation tactics. In this period of the contestation, the failures, or at least the shortcoming of the repressive policy came apparent. The peaceful governmental change in 2012 marked a new period in policy making that clearly exemplified a *failed repression* (Scenario 4), when the traders started persistently returning to the streets. Throughout 2012-2014 the new Georgian government chose to leave the practice in *limbo* - out-door/street trade remained illegal but increasingly tolerated in everyday practice. As the street trade volume increased, towards the end of 2014 the government started addressing the question on a formal/policy level that resulted in *legalisation of street-vending*.

CONTESTATION

In the summer of 2012, enforcement against vending in public spaces reached its harshest point in Tbilisi, capital of Georgia. Iliko, a book vendor in his 70s, continued vending outdoors. Iliko did not seem concerned by the possible fines, nor was he afraid of the state officials responsible for enforcing the regulations against illegal street vending. He had placed his books neatly alongside a front wall of one of the socialist buildings at the square. Even if he had no licence to vend, it appears, the state officials did not seem to be interested in him. This was due, as he put it, to the fact that he had successfully convinced the officials that he was not doing anything illegal. He did not put vending stalls on public soil (directly restricted by the law), instead used the carved walls of a building.

This apparent futile and sporadic example is, in our view, rooted in a more profound understanding of our argument. First, it shows how actors can come up with creative solutions, find the gaps between existing rules and regulations and bend them to their advantage – this is a nomadic and mobile response highlighting agency. Second, it also illustrates the power of informal negotiations and scope for informal interpretations of the rules. Even if Iliko didn't use vending stalls, he was not very different from those vendors classified as illegal. He did not pay taxes, nor

rent. However, Iliko was an older man, and had been vending at that site for over a decade. He had found a more or less reasonable justification for his actions, and framed his argument as well as his trade activity in a way that did not directly break the regulations. Hence, the officials accepted such an interpretation and turned a blind eye to Iliko's vending practices.

Informal negotiations of this type became vital to illegal street vendors' activity since the Rose Revolution of 2003.¹ Prior to the revolution, the Georgian government, headed by the president Shevardnadze, had largely allowed informal trade and service provision in public spaces (Salukvadze, 2009). So to appropriate public spaces was informal, but not illegal, illicit or criminalised through the 1990s. Consequently, the public spaces in the capital city were covered by improvised kiosks and vending stalls. The Georgian government was aware of its incapacity to provide even basic social security to its citizens as well as the incapacity of the Georgian economy to generate jobs. Following a devolutionary logic that was not new to former USSR spaces, it allowed 'do it by yourself' tactics and encouraged people to ensure their survival relying on small-scale informal economic practices (cf. Morris, 2012b).

In contrast to the previous one, the post-2003 government saw the prevalence of informality, and informal practices in public space in particular, as a socially and economically damaging phenomenon. On the one hand, the government was concerned with the image of the country and had peculiar visions of modernisation (Curro, 2015). These visions rendered informal economic practices and open-air bazaars as oriental, backward-looking practices (Khutsishvili, 2012) and oriented toward creating 'Western' or 'European-like' state (Frederiksen, 2012; Manning, 2009). Moreover, the post-2003 government aimed at establishing a liberal market economy. In the need of supporting the emergence of the institution of private property, it had to enforce functional separation between public space, as a space of sociability and private space/property, which could be used for commercial purposes (Rekhviashvili, 2015).

To meet the above mentioned goals, the Georgian government started suppressing petty trade from 2004, made unlicensed vending in public spaces illegal by 2006, and introduced high fines on illegal vending by 2011. However, licences were usually granted to companies, rather than individual applicants (Saladze, 2011). Finding a pitch inside a marketplace emerged as a single option for the absolute majority of vendors willing to legalise their trade activities. The state-owned markets were now being privatized and urban land was easily sold/leased, creating opportunities for openings of new bazaars and shopping centres. For the traders the process of privatization and marketization marked two types of instability. First, the instability of rental prices for the market-place pitches, and secondly, the instability of marketplaces (be it bazaars or shopping malls) as those were frequently closed down and opened up according to the private investor's preferences.

While a share of relatively stronger traders managed to secure pitches in privately owned market-places or shopping malls, others could not afford the rent prices. For this group of traders access to public spaces for vending became more important than ever.

Expression of dissatisfaction by citizens has been studied from various angles (Gupta, 2005; Scott, 1985; Della Porta, 2006). The contested territory below contentious politics and above unorganised resistance has not been sufficiently explored so far. According to Hirschman, dissatisfied citizens have two core options (apart from ‘loyalty’) to express their discontent. The voice option is related to collective mobilisation or public articulation of discontent, while exit option is communicating citizens’ dissatisfaction based on their withdrawal (Hirschman, 1970). Georgian traders tried both options. On the one hand, the traders reported that many of their colleagues decided to abandon vending activities after introduction of severe penalties. However, this exit option was not viable for many traders. At that point, subsistence agriculture barely provided minimum income, while given up to 30% unemployment in urban areas (GEOSTAT, 2015), alternative jobs were hard to find. Moreover, the traders could not rely, even temporarily, on social insurance, as the state offered meagre protective solutions, be it unemployment benefits or social assistance (Baumann, 2010). Thus, the traders attempted to voice their discontent and mobilise collectively against new regulations. In the years of 2004–2008 this mobilisation was spontaneous and dispersed.

By 2008, the mobilisation became more systematic, and the Street Vendor’s League was established for representing illegal vendors’ interests. The League was organising protests (Modebadze, 2010) and drafted a legal initiative to allow for a limited and regulated form of vending. These attempts of exercising collective voice waded in about two years, due to the government’s disregard towards the vendors’ protests and legislative initiatives.² Throughout 2010–2012 the government enhanced enforcement against street-vending more than at any point since the revolution. Despite breaking collective mobilisation efforts, suppressing underlying resistance proved to be a difficult, or even, an impossible task.

It is at this point, when collective voice is marginalised and exit options are limited or unavailable to the dissatisfied citizens, that informal negotiation as well as informal governance become vitally important. The Georgian petty traders that couldn’t adjust to the changes, relied on indirect and direct forms of informal negotiation of space and rules. Their indirect forms of negotiation included modification of everyday practices (de Certeau, 1984) as to avoid penalties for illegal vending. This process can be seen in terms of uncoordinated, everyday resistance (Scott, 1985) or, invisible and “quiet encroachment of the ordinary” (Bayat, 1997). In order to continue vending in public spaces and simultaneously escape policemen and city hall supervisors, many of the petty traders turned into street-peddlers, found underground passages and smaller streets to be less visible but still in proximity of former vending sites.³ Walking around the streets with baskets or plastic bags, trying

to sell the products to passers-by, the traders increased their mobility – and nomadism. Some started using mobile stalls (tables with wheels) to increase flexibility. The vendors that didn't turn into street paddlers and continued trading in relatively busy and visible parts of public spaces, developed collective tactics for signalling appearance of the state officials. In these cases vendors would trade in groups and assign few traders on watch, to alarm the group in case policemen or supervisors showed up. Relying on these different tactics the traders reasserted their presence in public spaces, and consistently undermined not just the regulations but also the state's capacity to enforce those regulations.

Besides informally negotiating the space through their daily practices, the vendors also engaged with the street-level officials thus negotiating acceptable forms of behaviour in a relatively more direct manner. Even if the vendors were focused on escaping from the officials instead of engaging with them, the two groups anyway interacted on daily bases. In cases when vendors detected officials on time and managed to hide the goods, some of the vendors stayed at the site and chit-chatted with the officials. In cases when the officials caught the traders and got hold of their goods, the process of sometimes lengthy negotiation would start over amount of fine or amount of good the officials could confiscate. While newly assigned policemen or city hall supervisors could be harsher on vendors, over time their relations with vendors became more personalised. This personalisation of the relations and officials' increased awareness of vendors' conditions and daily challenges hampered their ability to enforce the rules. This process that transmitted information from vendors to the state enforcing agents could be seen as an exercise of a limited vertical voice. Even if trader's horizontal voice was weakened by their incapacity to make collective claims, the vertical voice (for the distinction see O'Donnell, 1986) enabled them to make individual appeals targeting enforcing agents.

The persistence of everyday resistance as well as the limited vertical voice of the traders did influence the policy making in, at least, two respects, thus creating the space for what can be called an informal governance. First, becoming increasingly aware of each vendor's daily routines, their health conditions or family context, their dependants and vulnerabilities, the street-level officials started developing diverse approaches to the traders. They tried to ensure that the traders with higher turnover did not retain access to public space for vending and rented pitches inside marketplaces instead. They also tolerated illegal actions from the vendors that they perceived as more needy and insecure. Primarily in case of elderly ladies, the officials found it hard to remain strict and persistent. At points they would even get involved in solving vendors' daily troubles, for example, finding or purchasing medicine in case some of them felt sick.⁴

Secondly, and significantly, informal negotiation lead to informalization of governance, as expressed in the street-level officials' enhanced involvement in the relations between the traders and the owners of private market places. The officials were aware of traders' limited capacity to pay rent for pitches and knew that vendors

lacked information concerning the rent prices and working conditions at different market-places. As collective mobilisation had failed the traders were in no position to collectively bargain with the market owners over the prices. However, their disobedience, or exit, in this case was a powerful tool. The more traders decided to vend illegally in public spaces, the more the traders inside the marketplaces had the incentive to do the same. To avoid such massive swings, or emergence of the critical mass of illegal traders, the street level officials got extensively involved in the process of accommodating the traders inside the marketplaces. On the one hand, they gave information to the illegal vendors concerning the alternative market-places and shopping malls to rent pitches. On the other hand, they facilitated negotiations over the rental prices between traders and market-place owners, and tried to ensure that the rental prices remained stable over-time.

FAILED REPRESSION

The shortcomings of the government's repression policies were apparent even in the periods of most thorough enforcement of regulations against street vending. After the post-revolutionary government led by Mikheil Saakashvili was defeated by the Georgian Dream Coalition in the parliamentary elections of 2012, the failure of the repression became increasingly obvious. After the elections, the enforcement of the regulations against street vending was delegated from the city hall supervisors back to the police officers. In the immediate aftermath, the police officers tried to enforce the rules relatively vigorously. However, just as in the case of the supervisors, over time interaction with the traders softened the enforcement. Moreover, the political support for harsh anti-vending enforcement faded.

In consequence, by the summer of 2014, only two years after the Post-Revolutionary government of President Saakashvili was replaced by the Georgian Dream coalition, informal petty trade had once more changed the urban landscape in Tbilisi. Petty traders started slowly but persistently occupying streets, squares, and sidewalks. They came back to the light from the back streets and undergrounds, created or rather, recovered vending sites around the metro stations, put their stalls on the main avenues, decorated bus stations with the jewellery and souvenirs, and opened up the doors to the courtyards where fresh vegetables are sold. Similarly, the small shops in all the neighbourhoods started expanding on the expense of public spaces.

By the end of 2014 the government formally acknowledged the limits of the repressive policy. By December 30th Tbilisi City Municipality annulled the 2006 decree banning the street vending, removing an overall status of illegality on vending activities and calling for further regulations to determine places and forms of acceptable and unacceptable vending (Legislative Herald of Georgia, 2015). Soon, the municipalities of other large Georgian cities followed the example and rolled back

previous restrictions in favor of permitting vending according to newly established limitations. It is to be seen if the respective municipalities have the capacity and will to enforce complex and detailed regulations or the informal norms and ways of appropriating the public spaces will remain dominant in the years to come.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper has explored the crucial role of informal practices for enabling citizen's responses to policy changes, negotiation of rules between policy target groups and street-level bureaucrats. In the case of Georgia, the policy making was negotiated between the enforcing agents and the policy target group in an informal space. Unable to collectively voice concerns or entirely exit from a given policy sphere, the petty traders negotiated the space and rules with the state officials in direct and indirect forms. As a result of these informal negotiations, a share of petty traders turned into illegal vendors and street peddlers. The traders diverse tactics of daily appropriation of space and the difficulties in restricting traders' access to public spaces, prompted the state officials to allow exceptions and informally negotiate the rules with traders on daily based. While constantly fearing penalties, some of the vendors and peddlers that were perceived as more socially vulnerable by the state officials enjoyed implicit approval and tolerance from the officials. Yet another share of traders, that also communicated their dissatisfaction in informal manner, managed to find pitches inside privately owned market places on acceptable terms, relying on state official's extensive engagement and support. In doing so, the traders indeed developed new informal tactics, but also extensively relied on long-standing social norms and values. Traders' capacity to convince street-level officials in their interpretation of the policy change, and communicate their side of concerns, largely relied on evoking socially accepted norms, such as demand on respect of the women and elderly and shaming the officials in disrespect of cultural norms. On another end, the enforcing agents were compelled to expand their competencies and responsibilities and engage in what we can call informal governance practices. While these informal governance practices had shortcomings, they also partially eased the conditions of the traders and most importantly, enabled them to contest and even influence the policy design and enforcement mechanisms in the context where formal democratic channels of expressing collective voice were side-lined. The importance of such space of informal negotiation was reasserted in the Georgian Government's belated, but still outright recognition of the failure of the repressive policy against socially embedded and economically relevant informal economic practice, such as outdoor trade.

The given example of informal governance that emerges from the concrete empirical case of Georgian street traders allows the evaluation and recombination of various theories allied with informality to bring out the salience of moving beyond a legalistic, state-citizen, power-powerless frame of reference. The possibili-

ties for informal governance emerge in the grey zone, highlighted by references to Hirschman's classic triumvirate that govern responses to failing formal governance: exit, voice and loyalty. Using Hardt and Negri's recent insights into how grounded resistance can be imagined in the present, we argued that street traders engaged in a kind of 'refusal' of inadequate formal rules by operating a literal nomadism in their practices in a grey zone of licit-illicit, legal-illegal trading in public. This literal nomadism highlights the major insight of Hardt and Negri – their figurative use of the nomadism trope: namely mobility as a post-modern form of reinflected class struggle (Hardt and Negri, 2000, 213). Out of the 'non-place' that traders were put in by the arbitrary neoliberalisation of public space, they successfully created a 'new place' (ibid 217) via informal modes of governance. Ironically, this new mode was born out of the old: their enduring social embeddedness in morally licit forms of public and commercial life: the right to peddle.

NOTES

1. The Rose Revolution is a milestone in the history of Georgia, when the then president Eduard Shevardnadze was ousted and replaced by an opposition coalition that brought about a series of radical reforms dramatically improving the country's performances in social, economic and governance issues. See Jones, 2012; Ó Beacháin and Polese, 2010.
2. The Georgian government was in general discouraging, and at points actively suppressing labour union mobilisation (Muskhelishvili, 2011). Eliminating the fragile voice of the petty traders was accomplished quite fast and successfully.
3. To clarify, street-peddling was not a new practice to Tbilisi city-scape. Even prior the revolutionary changes street-peddlers offered food in and around trading sites, and small farmers delivered different agricultural goods to private homes in Tbilisi districts. As the repression of street vending started, many of the vendors and traders usually accustomed to trading in fixed locations also started involuntarily turning into street-peddlers to avoid product confiscation and fines.
4. This by no means meant that the officials were overall or always considerate and careful while interacting with the vendors. They were at points overtly harsh, and at other points simply following their instructions and penalising vendors. Rather, these examples of official's tolerance showed that personal judgments came in the way of enforcement. As the street-level officials were not taking bribes or benefiting from milder enforcement in any way, as a tendency such personal judgments would favour more needy traders.

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