

# Informal street vending: a comparative literature review

Informal street  
vending review

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – Informal street vending is traditionally widespread and studied concerning developing countries. Nevertheless, recently, interest in the study of this practice has also increased regarding specific developed countries. The aim of the article is to contribute to overcoming the tendency to investigate this informal economy sector with different analytical lenses between the global South and global North and to highlight the usefulness of analyzing the phenomenon from a comparative perspective.

**Design/methodology/approach** – Therefore, the article represents a comparative review of the existing literature on informal street vending considering both the global South and global North.

**Findings** – The analysis revealed similarities and differences in the characteristics the phenomenon assumes in the two areas of the world while at the same time, showing how there are aspects mainly explored in the literature of southern countries and little explored in the literature of northern countries and vice-versa.

**Research limitations/implications** – This analytical attempt allows us to highlight any gaps present in the literature, which may represent the basis for future comparative research on the topic. Comparative research will improve both theoretical and empirical knowledge of the phenomenon.

**Originality/value** – On the one hand, the article represents an innovative literature review attempt, as it explicitly compares the street vending between developing and developed countries. On the other hand, it represents the first academic contribution to review street vending in the global North.

**Keywords** Informal economy, Street vendors, Global South and global North, Urban policies, Strategies of resistance

**Paper type** Literature review

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## Introduction

Street vending represents one of the most visible manifestations of the informal economy and has been studied for over forty years by various disciplines, especially anthropology, economics and sociology. Street vending is traditionally rooted in the social and economic fabric of many southern countries and, therefore, has mostly been studied concerning Africa (e.g. [Steel et al., 2014](#); [Brown et al., 2010](#)), Asia (e.g. [Milgram, 2011](#); [Schindler, 2014](#)) and Latin America (e.g. [Crossa, 2009](#); [Donovan, 2008](#)). Nonetheless, in recent decades, interest in the study of the phenomenon regarding European and North American countries has also increased (e.g. [Devlin, 2011](#); [Boels, 2014](#)). In fact, street vending is no longer considered as a residual activity typical of global South and destined to disappear, but rather as a constantly growing phenomenon, affecting both developed and developing countries ([Graaff and Ha, 2015](#)). Despite the knowledge concerning street vending activities and more in general the informal economy has increased, to

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date there is no a univocal theory in defining the causes and characteristics of the informal economy. The theoretical contradictions are even more evident when one compares this phenomenon between developing and developed countries (Gerxhani, 2004; Chen, 2012). Moreover, while the literature on street vending in developing countries is characterized by a great deal of research, still few studies in industrialized countries exist. Besides, while some literature review articles strive to analyze this informal activity in the global South exist (e.g. Forkour *et al.*, 2017; Mitullah, 2004), there are no similar contributions concerning developed countries. Furthermore, except for some review articles that adopt a global perspective to study street vending (e.g. Bromley, 2000; Cross, 2000; Wongtada, 2014), there are no review attempts that explicitly compare the phenomenon in the two areas of the world. Therefore, this article represents a comparative literature review on street vending, considering both the southern and northern countries. It also constitutes the first attempt to review street vending in developed countries. The aim is to contribute in overcoming the tendency to investigate this informal economy sector with different analytical lenses between the global South and global North. Moreover, the article also aims to highlight how the comparison across the two institutionally distinct types of countries is fundamental to understand the informal street vending sector dynamics. Although the main focus of the article is on informal actors, it groups different manifestations of street vending. This choice stems from the difficulty of clearly distinguishing between the formal and informal economy as well as the awareness of the varying degrees of informal practices and, in turn, of different violations of trade regulations.

In the first section, the article will highlight the criteria for choosing and analyzing the studies included in the review. Subsequently, the article will present the main research methods and techniques adopted to study the phenomenon. The subsequent sections will discuss the aspects dealt with by the literature, highlighting the similarities and differences between the global South and global North. Therefore, the second passage will focus on street vendors' daily strategies and working conditions and, subsequently, it will highlight the street vendors' profile. The following section will present the informal street vending causes as well as the individual motives that drive to work informally. Subsequently, the article will underline the dimensions through which the literature investigates the link between the formal economy and the informal street trade sector. Then, the urban governance theme will be analyzed, by describing the perceptions behind street vending and the policies and practices adopted to regulate it. Finally, the paper will emphasize the street vendors' strategies to confront exclusionary policies and to negotiate for space. In the last paragraph, a discussion of the main similarities and differences between developing and developed countries will be proposed, supporting theoretical explanations. The article will conclude by presenting the implications for future comparative research on the topic.

### **Literature review: selection criteria and method of analysis**

To select and identify the most relevant studies on the topic, the Google Scholar online database was used. The selection process was guided by specific keywords, which have been reproduced in the following search phrase: *informal street vending OR street vendors OR street vendors' practices and working conditions OR street vending urban policies*. The search resulted in about 26,300 studies. Then the search was limited to studies published from 2000 to 2019, to present an updated picture of the phenomenon. Following this criterion, the search was reduced to approximately 20,100 studies. Moreover, non-scientific journals were excluded from the analysis. Therefore, the article considered scientific peer review journal articles, book chapters, research reports and working papers. Finally, only empirical studies were included in the analysis. Considering these selection criteria, the unqualified studies were rejected, through the implementation of a screening process. Initially, a large number of studies were eliminated after reading the title, the abstract and the keywords. Subsequently, other studies were excluded after a more detailed full-text screening. After the selection

process, only 59 studies were considered: 42 concerning developing countries and 17 regarding developed countries. In the analysis process, each study was read twice, identifying: the main topics and objectives, the research method and techniques and the geographical context. The analysis led to the construction of two tables: one for studies conducted in developing countries (Table 1) and one for those carried out in developed countries (Table 2). The tables summarize the main topics addressed in the literature, which have been included through a codification scheme, based on categories and subcategories of analysis. For instance, in relation to urban policies, the category “*Urban policies and regulations*” has been created, which corresponds to the subcategories: *neoliberal and other exclusionary policies; evictions; harassment; displacement policies and relocation; tolerance policies and others regulations*. Moreover, for each considered study has also been outlined: the name of the author, the year of publication, the city/country in which the study was conducted, the name of the journal or publishing house and the research techniques adopted.

### **Review of methodology: doing research on street vending**

In both developing and developed countries’ literature, qualitative investigation techniques are predominantly employed to study street selling. Nonetheless, in the literature on developing countries, 21 out of a total of 42 studies adopt qualitative investigation techniques (Table 1). In the literature on developed countries almost all studies, 14 out of 17, resort to participant observation, qualitative interviews or focus groups techniques (Table 2). This methodological tendency can be explained in light of the complexity of studying the informal economy through quantitative techniques, due to the lack of official statistical data. Moreover, almost all the studies considered represent case study research, studying street vending concerning a specific city or neighborhood. This aspect responds to the tendency to implement qualitative techniques, which inevitably affect the empirical context dimensions. Nevertheless, ten cross-national and continental studies, conducted in different developing countries, were also selected. These studies, which consider either several cities in the same country or various cities across different continents, employ a comparative approach to study the phenomenon (Table 1). Despite the tendency to adopt qualitative techniques, a portion of the studies conducted in developing countries implement quantitative investigation techniques, six of them use mixed method techniques and eight resort to survey techniques (Table 1). In the developed countries’ literature, this methodological aspect hardly emerges. Indeed, only 3 out of 17 studies adopt quantitative techniques (Table 2). Finally, as regards the geographical composition of the selected studies, 13 of them were conducted in Asia, 12 in Latin America and 7 in Africa. As regards the developed countries, 11 studies were conducted in Europe and 6 in North America.

### **The street vendors’ daily strategies and working conditions**

Informal street vending is defined as the production and selling of legal goods and services in urban public spaces, which is not officially regulated by the law and is carried out in non-permanent built structures (Cross, 2000). Although street vending represents an important informal sector, the exact global number of street vendors is unknown. Despite that, official regional statistics and research, which highlight the vast extent of the sector in specific developing countries, exist. For instance, in sub-Saharan Africa, street vendors account from 12 to 14% of the total urban informal employment, in India 14% and in Lima and Peru, street vendors represent 9% of the total informal urban workers (Roever, 2014). Moreover, while in the global South a large segment of street vendors work informally (Roever, 2016), in many developed countries, informal sales activities still represent a minority in relation to the entire sector (Boels, 2014; Blanchard, 2011). Traditionally, street vending is defined using the dichotomous distinction between formal and informal, or regular and irregular economic activities. Nevertheless, to highlight the heterogeneity of the phenomenon, in both developing

**Table 1.**  
Studies on developing  
countries

The study	Journal article/Book chapter/ Research report/ Working paper	Country and city	Methodology				Street vending characteristics				Urban policies and regulations				Forms of resistance and negotiation						
			Qualitative techniques data	Primary and secondary data	Mixed method	Survey data	Secondary data	Street vendors' strategies and working conditions	Street vendors' characteristics	Causes and individual motives	Formal and informal economy policies	Neoliberal and exclusionary policies	Eviction	Harassment	Relocation	Displacement policies/ regulations	Tolerance and others	Individual strategies	Collective strategies		
Africa	Rogerson (2016)	Jobannesburg, South Africa		X					X												
	Itahane and Sherry (2008)	Castablanca, Morocco	X																		
	Steel <i>et al.</i> (2014)	Accra, Ghana			X																
	Morange (2015)	Nairobi, Kenya				X															
	Lyons and Shoxet (2005)	Nairobi, Kenya				X															
	Seisshi and Letula (2008)	Maseru, Lesotho			X																
	Onodogo <i>et al.</i> (2015)	Enugu City, Nigeria	X																		
	Elzaid (2015)	Dhaka, Bangladesh				X															
	Milgram (2011)	Bangor City, Philippines	X																		
	Schneider (2014)	Delhi, India	X																		
Asia	Reid <i>et al.</i> (2010)	Liaoning, China	X																		
	Ball and Loebanus (2014)	Beijing, China		X																	
	Sidens (2014)	Guangzhou, China																			
	Hung <i>et al.</i> (2014)	Hanoi, Vietnam	X																		
	Tsuner and Schoenberg (2012)	Hanoi, Vietnam	X																		
	Rocio and Gomez (2013)	Cebu, Philippines	X																		
	Anjaria (2006)	Mumbai, India			X																
	Wong and Kim (2016)	Heindeu City, Taiwan	X																		

(continued)

Continent	Country and city	The study	Journal article/Book chapter/Research report/Working paper	Methodology			Street vending characteristics				Urban policies and regulations				Forms of resistance and negotiation				
				Qualitative techniques	Primary and secondary data	Mixed method	Survey data	Secondary data	Street vendors' working conditions	Street vendors' and working conditions characteristics	Causes and individual motives	Formal and informal economy	Neoliberal and exclusionary policies	Eviction	Harassment	Relocation	Displacement policies/	Tolerance policies and others regulations	Individual strategies
	Bangalore, India		Williams and Gurtou (2012)			X			X										
	Mumbai, India		Saha (2009)			X							X						X
	Bangkok, Thailand		Boonibum (2017)	X										X					X
Latin America	Cusco, Peru		Steel (2012)			X												X	X
	Cusco, Peru		Bronley and Mackie (2009)			X													X
	Mexico City, Mexico		Crossa (2016)	X															X
	Bogotá, Colombia		Hunt (2006)	X															X
	Bogotá, Colombia		Donovan (2008)																X
	Mexico City, Mexico		Reyes (2013)						X										X
	San Paolo, Brazil		Curi (2016)	X															X
	Bogotá, Colombia		Falla and Valencia (2019)	X															X
																			X

(continued)

Continent	Country and city	Journal article/Book chapter/ Research Working Paper	Publisher	Methodology			Street vending characteristics				Urban policies and regulations				Forms of resistance and negotiation		
				Qualitative techniques	Primary and secondary data	Mixed method	Survey data	Street vendors' strategies and working conditions	Street vendors' characteristics	Causes and individual motives	Formal and informal economy policies	Neoliberal and exclusionary policies	Eviction	Harassment	Displacement policies/ Relocation	Tolerance policies and others regulations	Individual strategies
	Bogotá, Colombia	Vargas and Urriboyeve (2015)	Droit et société	X				X	X						X		X
	Cali, Colombia	Martinez <i>et al.</i> (2018)	Cities		X			X	X								
	Porto Alegre, Brazil	Coletto (2010)	Palgrave Macmillan, New York	X				X	X								
	Mexico City, Mexico	Crossa (2009)	International Journal of Urban and Regional Research	X				X	X						X		X
Cross-Continental research	Accra, Ghana; Ahmedabad, India; Bangkok, Thailand; Belo Horizonte, Brazil; Bogotá, Colombia; Durban, South Africa; Lahore, Pakistan; Lima, Peru; Nakuru, Kenya; and Pune, India	Blowmilk (2001)	Prepared for National Alliance of Street Vendors in India (NASVI), WBGO				X										
Cross-National Research	Mumbai, Ahmedabad, Indore, Calcutta, Bhubaneswar and Bangalore	Blowmilk (2001)	Prepared for National Alliance of Street Vendors in India (NASVI), WBGO				X										X

(continued)

The study	Journal article/Book chapter/ Research report/ Working paper	Publisher	Methodology			Street vending characteristics				Urban policies and regulations				Forms of resistance and negotiation		
			Qualitative techniques	Primary and secondary data	Mixed method	Survey data	Street vendors' strategies and working conditions	Street vendors' characteristics	Causes and individual motives	Formal and informal economy	Neoliberal and exclusionary policies	Eviction	Harassment	Displacement policies/ Relocation	Tolerance policies and others regulations	Individual strategies
Continent																
Country and city																
Quito and Guayaquil, Ecuador	Swanson (2007)	Anipode	X				X				X					
Harbin and Shanghai, China	Hanser (2016)	The China Quarterly	X				X				X				X	X
Colombia, Venezuela, Peru, Mexico, Chile and Brazil	Roever (2010)	Prepared for the WIEGO Urban Programme		X			X		X		X		X			X
Senegal, Ghana, Tanzania and Lesotho	Brown <i>et al.</i> (2010)	Urban Studies	X				X		X		X		X			X
Kenya, Uganda, Zimbabwe, Ghana, Cote D'Ivoire and South Africa	Mtullah (2004)	WIEGO, Cambridge, MA.		X			X		X		X				X	
Bogotá, Colombia and Lima, Peru	Linares (2018)	International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy		X			X				X				X	
Delhi, India and Phnom Penh City, Cambodia	Sekhani <i>et al.</i> (2019)	Cities	X				X		X		X					
Beijing and Guangzhou, China	Swidler (2015)	Critical Sociology				X	X		X		X					

Table 1.

**Table 2.**  
Studies on developed  
countries

The study	Methodology				Street vending characteristics				Urban policies and regulations				Forms of resistance and negotiation						
	Journal article/ Book chapter/ Research report/ Working paper	publisher	Qualitative techniques	Primary and secondary data	Mixed method	Survey data	Secondary data	Street vendors' strategies and working conditions	Street vendors' characteristics	Causes and individual motives	Formal and informal economy	Neoliberal and exclusionary policies	Ejection	Harassment	Relocation	Displacement policies/ regulations	Tolerance policies and others	Individual strategies	Collective strategies
United States	Los Angeles, California	Urban Anthropology and Studies of Cultural Systems and World Economic Development International Journal of Urban and Regional Research	X					X	X		X						X		X
		Bhimji (2010)																	
	Chicago, Illinois	Development International Journal of Urban and Regional Research	X					X	X	X									
		Martin (2014)																	
	Chicago, Illinois	Human Organization Journal of Cultural Geography Planning Theory						X	X	X									
		Rajman (2001)																	
	New York City, New York	Journal of Cultural Geography Planning Theory	X						X	X									X
		Devlin, 2019																	
	New York City, New York	Geography Planning Theory	X						X	X									X
		Devlin (2011)																	
	Los Angeles, California	Area	X						X	X									X
		Manoz (2016)																	

(continued)



The study	Journal article/ Book chapter/ Research report/ Working paper Country and city	Methodology	Street vending characteristics			Urban policies and regulations				Forms of resistance and negotiation							
			Qualitative techniques	Primary and secondary data	Mixed method Survey data	Street venders' strategies and working conditions	Street vendors' characteristics	Causes and individual motives	Formal and informal economy policies	Neoliberal and exclusionary policies	Eviction Harassment	Displacement policies/ Rehabilitation	Tolerance policies/ others regulations	Individual strategies	Collective strategies		
Europe	Genova, Italy	X				X	X	X									
	DeLuca (2012)																
	Journal for Undergraduate Ethnography																
Milano, Italy	Caletro (2019)	X				X	X	X	X								X
	Il Mulino																
Barcelona, Spain	Moffette (2018)	X				X	X	X									X
	Bologna																
Brussels, Belgium	Boels (2014)	X				X	X	X	X								X
	Criminology International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy																
Adriatic coast of Emilia Romagna, Italy	Neikens (2006)				X	X	X	X									X
	Crime, Law and Social Change																
Naples and Torino, Italy	Schmoll and Semi (2013)	X				X	X	X	X								
	Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power																
Alicante, Spain	L'hoie and Gasta (2007)				X	X	X	X									X
	International Journal of Iberian Studies																
Naples, Italy	Harvey (2004)	X				X	X	X									X
	International Journal of Economic Development Arena																
Montpellier, France	Tchoukaleyska (2015)	X				X	X	X	X								X
Paris, France	Millot and Tonnelet (2013)	X				X	X	X									X
Torino, Italy	Blanchard (2011)	X				X	X	X	X								X
	Mordi migrants																

Table 2.

and developed countries literature, the tendency to distinguish the sector according to street vendors' working strategies, prevails. In this regard, three main street vendors' categories can be defined: *mobile or itinerant vendors*, who undertake their activities by moving to different places throughout the working day; *fixed-stall or stationary vendors*, who work in a stable place during the working day and *semi-fixed* street vendors, who momentarily dispose their goods on improvised structures along the street (Coletto, 2019; Boels, 2014; Mitullah, 2004; Brown *et al.*, 2010; Boonjubun, 2017; Cuvi, 2016). Each category of street vendors corresponds to a different degree of legal regulation violation, but also to differences in terms of working conditions. Commonly, the street vendors' working conditions are characterized by low incomes, the absence of social security or state benefits, long working hours and unsafe workplace environments (Eltzon, 2015; Saha, 2009). Furthermore, several studies highlight how street vendors' working conditions also depend, for instance, on street vendors' sex (Turner and Schoenberger, 2012; Milgram, 2011; Munoz, 2016) and ethnicity, thus their context of origin (Martin, 2014; DeLuca, 2012). Finally, the working conditions of street vendors can also vary regarding the type of goods sold (Cuvi, 2016). Street vendors' daily working conditions and strategies are aspects highly investigated in the recent literature on the phenomenon, emerging in almost all the studies considered, both in developing and developed countries (Tables 1 and 2).

### **The street vendors' profile**

Almost all the selected studies highlight the socio-demographic and economic characteristics of street vendors (Tables 1 and 2). In many developing countries, street vending represents an important source of income mainly for marginalized and poor people, especially for internal rural migrants (Roever, 2014; Onodugo *et al.*, 2016; Turner and Schoenberger, 2012; Swider, 2015). Moreover, in many developing countries, petty trade is performed mainly by less educated people (Steel *et al.*, 2014; Turner and Schoenberger, 2012). Street vending requires low professional skills and human capital resources, is chosen especially by those who have fewer resources to invest (Roever, 2014). In many developing countries, primarily in Asia and Africa, gender also influences street selling practices. In fact, in many southern countries, women represent a majority of street vendors (Bhowmik, 2001; Milgram, 2011; Williams and Gurtoo, 2012). Finally, as some studies emphasize, the sector is also comprised by workers who were previously employed in the formal sector and who, in the absence of alternatives, were forced to enter the informal economic circuit (Milgram, 2011; Schindler, 2014). In developed countries, instead of internal rural migrants, informal street vending activities are carried out by immigrants. In some North American cities, Latin Americans represent the main categories of migrants who carry out informal street vending activities (Bhimji, 2010; Martin, 2014; Munoz, 2016). Moving the analysis to the European context, the majority of informal street vendors are from North-African and South-East Asian countries (L'Hote and Gasta, 2007; Blanchard, 2011; Harvey, 2004; DeLuca, 2012). The close relationship between informal street vending and immigrant status highlights how in many developed countries, migrants, mostly irregular, suffer from socio-economic discrimination, which drives them to find work in unskilled segments of the labor market, often in the informal economy (Raijman, 2001; Boels, 2014; DeLuca, 2012).

### **Street vending causes and individual motives**

Another amount of studies, almost half of those conducted in the northern countries and a half in the southern ones (Tables 1 and 2), investigates the informal street vending causes and the individual reasons that drive to work informally. In many developing countries, the low level of industrialization, the surplus of labor and the process of urbanization, combined with

an economic system based on the use of little technology and low-paid unskilled workers, represent the main factors affecting the high presence of the informal economy (Gerxhani, 2004; Roever, 2014). Moreover, the ambiguous role of the law and high level of institutional corruption also affect the high impact of informal street vending in many developing countries (Milgram, 2011; Schindler, 2014; Mitullha, 2004). In developed countries, instead, the growth of the informal economy is linked to the recent economic crisis, the growing levels of unemployment and the decrease in welfare spending. Moreover, globalization has accelerated non-standard work activity and a type of low-capital and labor-intensive tertiary sector, which is often reproduced in the informal economy, thanks to the implementation of unskilled migrant labor force (Coletto, 2019; Devlin, 2019; Boels, 2014).

Specific individual motivations also influence the choice to undertake informal economic activities. In both areas of the world, street vending represents, first and foremost, an economic survival activity. In fact, in the absence of alternatives, street vending represents a choice driven by the necessity to obtain daily income (Boels, 2014; Rajjman, 2001; Crossa, 2009; Bromley and Mackie, 2009). Moreover, in many developing countries, street selling is also described as a voluntary and rational choice, which allows individuals to reach a certain degree of flexibility and work independence (Williams and Gurtoo, 2012). Furthermore, while in many southern countries, street vending represents a traditional and stable activity, performed for generations (Crossa, 2009; Williams and Gurtoo, 2012), in industrialized countries it often represents a temporary occupation (DeLuca, 2012; L'hote and Gasta, 2007). In addition, while in many developing countries street vending often represents a cultural choice, in which social capital and family network play an important role (Turner and Schoenberger, 2012; Crossa, 2016; Williams and Gurtoo, 2012), in many industrialized countries, the diffusion of informal vending activities can be explained by the fact that migrants often reproduce in their host countries economic activity that are traditionally widespread in their countries of origin (Boels, 2014; Blanchar, 2011).

### **The relation between formal and informal economy**

The link between the formal economy and informal street vending represents another aspect investigated in the literature, even if by relatively few studies (Tables 1 and 2). First of all, the analysis of this piece of literature denotes the blurriness of the boundary between the informal and formal economy, because street vending activities are often characterized by an overlap of regular and irregular, legal and illegal conditions (Milgram, 2011; Schindler, 2014; Coletto, 2019). Considering the literature on developing countries, the relationship between the formal economy and street vending is mainly addressed concerning the system to obtain permits to sell on the streets and regarding the connection between informal workers and the global value chains system (Schindler, 2014; Cuvj, 2016; Martinez *et al.*, 2018). In fact, some studies highlight how the supply chain process of the products sold by street vendors take place, in almost all cases, in the formal economy (Schindler, 2014; Sekhani *et al.*, 2019). Moreover, despite the various efforts to formalize street vendors, other studies highlight how workers often remain in a condition of permanent informality, due to often ambiguous commercial and urban regulations as well as the element of discretion with which, in many cases, state or local authorities grant permits to sell in the urban public space (Milgram, 2011; Schindler, 2014; Cuvj, 2016). Furthermore, in some cases, the total number of licenses available is lower than the number of overall requests (Anjaria, 2006). In addition, many street vendors highlight the difficulty of earning enough money to pay regular fees (Roever, 2014). Focusing instead on developed countries, the link between informal street vending and the formal economy mostly concerns the dynamics of conflict between regular and informal street vendors. In this regard, several studies show how informal selling activities often take place within open-air markets, where informal actors share the location with regular vendors (Coletto, 2019; Boels, 2014;

Blanchard, 2011; Devlin, 2019). The coexistence, often in the same urban spaces, of the two types of vendors encourages dynamics of conflict and competition (Coletto, 2019; Tchoukaleyska, 2015). Some other studies also highlight the regulation system and the procedures for obtaining licenses as factors that affect the informal street vendors' condition. In fact, migrants often sell without regular permits, since licenses are inaccessible in terms of costs and unobtainable due to the incompatible status of irregular migrants, which is common to many street vendors in developed countries (Martin, 2014; Tchoukaleyska, 2015).

### **Urban policies and street vending regulations**

The aspects mostly addressed in the recent literature concern the policies adopted to regulate the street vending sector and the informal actors' reactions when faced with such regulations. In this section, the article will investigate the policies and practices adopted by local authorities, while in the next section it will highlight the informal actors' resistance strategies. The literature on the global South gives particular attention to urban policies and practices adopted by local and state authorities to regulate street vending, with 34 out of 42 studies addressing this theme (Table 1). In contrast, the literature on developed countries includes a less substantial number of studies focused on local regulations and enforcement agents practices (Table 2).

#### *The perceptions behind street vending*

The analysis of this piece of the literature allows presenting a picture of how public opinion and local authorities perceive and describe the street vending activity. Although different studies, conducted both in developing and developed countries, describe street vending as a fundamental economic activity, which acts as a social safety net for marginal and poor populations (Rogerson, 2016; Bhowmik, 2001; Boels, 2014; DeLuca, 2012), the tendency to perceive street vendors as a problem prevails. Primarily, street vendors are often accused of illegally using public spaces and of damaging the image of the city (Lindell, 2019). This emerges mostly in the literature on developing countries, where informal street vending undermines the success of modernization projects aimed at making Southern cities of the world competitive with the Northern global cities (Donovan, 2008; Rogerson, 2016; Anjaria, 2006). Moreover, street vendors are also accused of promoting forms of degradation and chaos and, therefore, of undermining the social order (Saha, 2009; Boonjubun, 2017; Turner and Schoenberg, 2012; Devlin, 2019). Finally, informal street vending competes with the formal trade market, generating negative economic effects for the commercial sector (Steel, 2012; Forkuor *et al.*, 2017; Mitullah, 2004).

#### *Urban governance model: between exclusionary policies and more tolerant regulations*

During the 1970s, a tolerant policy against street vending prevailed in almost all developing countries. Nevertheless, between the 80s and 90s, the tendency to intervene to reduce the street vendors' presence spread, in line with the neoliberal urban governance model promoted in the United States and later introduced to many developing countries (Lindell, 2019; Swansom, 2007; Donovan, 2008; Crossa, 2016). Therefore, the recent public discourse on security have stimulated street trade criminalization and the adoption of exclusionary policies in many developing countries (Reyes, 2013; Rogerson, 2016; Eltzold, 2015; Hanser, 2016; Morange, 2015). First of all, in various developing countries, the adoption of eviction campaigns against street vendors, to make cities more attractive for foreign investment and international tourism is a widespread trend (Falla and Valencia, 2019; Reyes, 2013; Rogerson, 2016; Setsabi and Leduka, 2008; Eltzon, 2015). Other studies highlight the implementation of displacement policies and relocation projects, aimed at moving street vendors to

decentralized areas of the city, assigning them regular working places (Reyes, 2013; Swanson, 2007; Donovan, 2008; Weng and Kim, 2016). Nonetheless, the objective to make street vendors invisible often persists behind most of the relocation projects, in line with the gentrification plans widespread in many developing countries, especially in Latin American cities (Hunt, 2009; Bromley and Mackie, 2009; Crossa, 2009). Finally, another set of studies shows how policemen and local authorities often adopt forms of harassment and abuse against street vendors, such as monetary extortion or arbitrary confiscation of merchandise for personal consumption (Schindler, 2014; Rogerson, 2016; Lyons and Snoxell, 2005; Etzold, 2015; Milgram, 2011; Brown *et al.*, 2010). Despite that, a small number of other studies highlight how local authorities appear to oscillate between the adoption of exclusionary policies and more tolerant regulations (Table 1). Indeed, the awareness that street vending represents an important source of income for marginalized people also persists. These ambivalent positions often generate contradictory regulatory models (Rogerson, 2016; Bell and Loukaitou-Sideris, 2014; Huang *et al.*, 2014).

An analysis of the urban policies adopted in the global North reveals, instead, the contrast between the more heterogeneous and tolerant model that prevails in the European context and the repressive and no-tolerance regulations dominant in the US (Table 2). Recent studies conducted in different North American cities highlight how various local governments are characterized by forms of uncertainty and legislative ambiguity in the regulation of street trade (Devlin, 2019; Bhimji, 2010). In this regard, contradictory laws favor city authorities' discretionary acts against street vendors, who are in some cases, subjected to intimidation mechanisms and physical expulsion measures (Martin, 2014; Devlin, 2019). Moving the analysis to the European context, the literature reveals how in some cities, street vending activities are repressed because the control of street vendors is often linked to the aim of controlling irregular immigration (Moffette, 2018; L'hote and Gasta, 2007). Nevertheless, the local authorities' tendency to give little priority to informal vending activities emerges (Nelken, 2006; Boels, 2014). In fact, some studies highlight how greater attention is often paid to intercepting the mechanisms behind the sale of counterfeit goods, rather than to massively controlling those who sell the goods on the streets (Boels, 2014; Schmoll and Semi, 2013; Milliot and Tonnelat, 2013).

### **Street vendors' strategies of resistance and negotiation**

For decades, street vendors have been considered as marginal individuals who passively practice their activities (Lindell, 2019; Falla and Valencia, 2019). More recently, several studies, mainly those conducted in global South, have emphasized the role of the street vendors' agency, highlighting the strategies of resistance and negotiation they employ to confront exclusionary policies and guarantee their right to work in the public space (Crossa, 2016; Schindler, 2014; Hunt, 2009; Boonjubun, 2017). In this regard, almost all studies conducted in both developing and developed countries (Tables 1 and 2), highlight the informal actors' ability to modify their daily strategies and resiliently resist political limitations. Through the analysis of the literature, it is possible to identify both individual and collective strategies of resistance.

#### *Individual strategies*

At a more individual level, street vendors, in both developing and developed countries, adopt similar strategies of resistance. First of all, street vendors often act in an itinerant manner, adjusting their practices of vending. Bringing fewer goods and constantly moving around the streets not only allows to escape faster but also to be more invisible and attract less attention (Milgram, 2011; Crossa, 2009; Boels, 2014; DeLuca, 2012). Another strategy, in this sense, is to move the businesses to less controlled places, to avoid forms of harassment and confiscation

by city authorities (Stell, 2012; Milgram, 2011; Boels, 2014). Moreover, street vendors also tend to anticipate the local authorities' actions as a way of avoiding forms of control. Indeed, they identify the police working hours and adjust their activities accordingly, to coincide with the lower presence of the police (Bhimji, 2010; L'Hote and Gasta, 2007; Coletto, 2019; Recio and Gomez, 2013; Turner and Schoenberger, 2012). Finally, another daily strategy involves bribing city authorities or street gangs, to guarantee the possibility to work on the street. This practice makes it possible for street vendors to improve their conditions and survive in the urban public space (Eltzon, 2015; Milgram, 2011; Munoz, 2016; Anjaria, 2006; Mitullah, 2004).

### *Collective strategies*

The literature also highlights how social capital and street vendor networks play an important role in deploying daily strategies of collective resistance (Lyon and Snoxell, 2005). Some studies conducted in both developing and developed countries, show how vendors tend to support each other, for example by sending messages or adopting communications signals to prevent eviction from city authorities (Cuvi, 2016; Crossa, 2009; Steel, 2012; Lyons and Snoxell, 2005; L'Hote and Gasta, 2007; Boels, 2014). Other studies, conducted in some developing countries, show how, in specific situations, street vendors resort to public demonstrations to protect their right to work on public spaces (Crossa, 2009; Recio and Gomez, 2013; Roever, 2016; Millgram, 2011). Moreover, in many developing countries, the presence of street vendors' associations and organizations is often crucial for negotiating with local authorities and improving bargaining power. In fact, local street vendors' associations, which are spreading across many cities of the global South, give voice to the street vendors' interests (Donovan, 2008; Weng and Kim, 2016; Roever, 2016; Saha, 2009; Crossa, 2016). Other studies highlight how, in many less developed countries, street vendors can also use their vote as bargaining power (Donovan, 2008; Milgram, 2011). The leaders of local associations, who control the street vendors' political consensus, grant the local authorities electoral and political favors in exchange for privileged treatment and the possibility to work (Crossa, 2009; Eltozon, 2015). Finally, in many less developed countries, non-governmental organizations also play an important role. For example, Street Net International and WIEGO negotiate with governments and local authorities to defend informal workers' rights and encourage the regularization of their conditions (Roever, 2014; Bhowmik, 2001; Cuvi, 2016).

### **Discussion**

The following table summarizes the main differences and similarities that emerged to study street vending in both developing and developed countries, aimed to explain these comparative findings (Table 3). The table represents an attempt at synthesis, which necessarily extremes some comparative elements that are more subtle and complex and, therefore, need to be deepened and investigated through future research.

The first distinction emerges if we look at the informal street vending sector size. In the global South, many street vendors work informally, while in developed countries informal vending activities represent a minority compared to the entire sector. Another difference concerns the street vendors' profile and the sector role. In global South, street vending is mainly performed by internal rural migrants and by poorer and less educated people, while in developed countries it is carried out by immigrants. Moreover, in southern countries street vending represents a stable working activity, performed for generations, however in industrialized countries it is mainly perceived as a temporary occupation, carried out as immigrants' first activity in host countries. The different economic system and the diversified effects that economic globalization has generated in the two types of countries may partially explain these differences (Temkin and Veizaga, 2010; Gerxhani, 2004). In the literature several are the theories that look at economic factors to explain the different degrees of the informal

Differences	Global South	Global North
The informal street vending size	Many street vendors work informally	A small segment of street vendors works informally
Street vendors' profile	Internal rural migrants and poor/less educated people	Immigrants
Role of street vending sector	Stable and culturally rooted working activity	Temporary occupation or the first immigrants working activity
Formal economy and informal street vending relation	(1) The system of licenses (2) The link between informal workers and the global value chains system	Conflict between regular and informal street vendors
The different aspects dealt with by the literature	(1) Urban policies and the street vendors' strategies of resistance (2) Both individual and collective strategies of resistance	(1) Migrants street vendors' activities and the exclusion mechanisms they experience (2) Individual strategies of resistance
Similarities	Global South	Global North
Methodology		Qualitative methods and techniques Case study research approach
Urban governance model		Neoliberal and other exclusionary policies
Individual motives		Survival reasons

**Table 3.** Differences and similarities between developing and developed countries

economy between countries. For instance, the *world-system theory* applied to the study of informality allows us to highlight how due to the developing countries' economic system, based on a low level of industrialization, on the use of little technology and low-paid unskilled workers, these countries have experienced more rapid and widespread development of the informal economy than developed countries. Furthermore, the rapid urbanization process of the 1980s, which affected many southern cities, has increased the surplus of labor, encouraging the development of informality. On the contrary, the industrialized countries tend to specialize in capital-intensive and high-skill service sectors (Roberts, 2013; Bhowmik, 2012). Therefore, in these contexts, only people without the skills to compete for high-tech formal employment, especially immigrants, are forced to work informally, mostly in the labor-intensive tertiary sector (Sassen, 2007). Other theoretical approaches look rather at institutional factors to explain the size and characteristics of the informal economy of a given country. Borrowing the *institutionalist approach*, the high weight of the informal street vending sector in many developing countries can be explained by a widespread distrust in institutions and by the asymmetry between formal institutions and informal norms. This asymmetry promotes a distance between the state morality and that of the individual, who therefore may be more inclined to enter the informal economy (Lyon, 2007; Williams *et al.*, 2015). Continuing to analyze the main differences, in the global South literature the relation between formal economy and informal street vending is mostly studied concerning the system to obtain permits to sell in public space and regarding the link between the informal workers and the global value chains system. Meanwhile, in the developed countries' literature, this link has mostly been studied regarding the conflict dynamics between regular and irregular street vendors. Furthermore, the studies on Southern countries focused more on the policies implemented to regulating street vending and the street vendors' resistance strategies, while the literature on industrialized countries analyzed more the relationship between possessing the discriminating status of immigrant and entering into the informal economy. Finally, while a substantial number of studies on both developing and developed countries highlight the street vendors' strategies of

resistance, only several studies on developing countries emphasize the individual agency's role and the street vendors' collective bargaining power. This can be explained by the fact that are mostly global South' researchers who adopt an actor-oriented approach to study manifestations of urban informality (Devlin, 2019; Lindell, 2019). Using the conceptual framework proposed by Bayat to study informality in global South, street vending is not simply an activity to cope with socio-economic injustices but also an intentional resistance practice that transgresses spatial and legal norms (Bayat, 2004).

Continuing to analyze the literature review findings, common aspects are also highlighted. The first similarity is represented by the tendency to use qualitative investigation techniques and case study research approach to study street vending. Furthermore, similar trajectories emerge if we look at the urban governance model adopted to regulate informal trade. Recent studies conducted in both developing and North American countries reveal the tendency to embrace neoliberal and exclusionary policies to regulate informal street vending. It can be explained by the fact that global economic trends affect the state and local authorities' approach to manage and conceive marginality and the urban informality in the global cities' public spaces. Many countries tend to adopt exclusionary policies to eliminate the presence of street vendors, as their marginal activity does not meet the standards imposed by economic globalization (Graaff and Ha, 2015; Lindell, 2019; Roever, 2014). Furthermore, the theoretical debate on the informal economy highlights how concerning most informal sectors the use of survival criterion in defining the reasons to work informally is valid for the southern countries and not for industrialized countries (Gerxhani, 2004). On the contrary, the analysis on street vending sector showed how, although in some cases in global South it represents a voluntary or rational choice, in both two types of countries it constitutes, first and foremost, an economic survival activity. This aspect can be explained using the conceptual framework proposed by the *structuralist theory* to study the informal economy. This approach considers the informal work functional and subordinated to the formal economy. Indeed, the market liberalization and the economic globalization increase dynamics of socio-economic polarization, with the result that unskilled workers and marginal people are forced to work informally, as they cannot find a job in the formal economy (Portes *et al.*, 1989; Sassen, 2007).

### Conclusions

The article aimed to contribute in overcoming the tendency to employ different analytical lenses to study street vending between the global South and global North and to highlight the usefulness of analyzing the phenomenon in a comparative perspective. To do this, a comparative literature review on the topic has been conducted. It represents an innovative review attempt, as it explicitly compares this manifestation of informality between the two institutionally different types of countries. Moreover, it constitutes also the first contribution to review street vending in the global North.

The findings discussed in the last section suggest both similarities and differences regarding the street vending characteristics and concerning the aspects deal with by the literature to study it between global South and global North. Therefore, the analysis highlights some gaps present in the literature to study this informal economy sector, which can represent the basis for future comparative research on the topic. On the one hand, comparative research can stimulate the development of a theory that promotes a univocal interpretation and explanation of the informal street vending sector, considering simultaneously a set of factors that affect the informal economy of a given country (institutional, economic and cultural factors). Comparative case study research can also encourage the building of a theory aims at explain this manifestation of informality considering the specificities of both developing and developed countries. Moreover, despite informal street selling occurs both in developing and developed countries, in the literature comparative case studies aimed at investigating this informal sector between so different



contexts from both an institutional and economic point of view are missing. Therefore, on the other hand, future comparative research can improve also empirical knowledge of the phenomenon. Comparative research will allow us to better understand to what extent individual motives, institutional and economic contextual factors and economic globalization affect the street trade sector in a given context. Furthermore, to address the transformations, but also the opportunities generated by economic globalization, a change in economic and social policies regarding urban informality is also necessary. In a climate of global growing income inequality, informal practices like street vending play an important economic and social role. Indeed, informal street vending guarantees daily income for an increasing poor and marginal side of the world population. Furthermore, while in developing countries street vendors provide goods and services that satisfy the demand of a growing low-income population, in industrialized countries, as this activity often represents the first immigrants' livelihood occupation, street vending also prevents entry into illicit or criminal circuits. Therefore, the state and local institutions should recognize the positive implications that would be generated if the street vendors' working conditions and rights were improved. Hence institutions should investigate the extend of the informal street vendors population and increase the number of licenses, promoting the transition into formal entrepreneurship. Increasing specific regulations to support street vending livelihoods would represent the basis for a more supportive urban economy, which aims to guarantee rights and protections to actors excluded from the formal economy circuit.

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