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Street Vendors and the Right to the City: Justice in the Regulation of Public Space in Yogyakarta

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Abstract

The regulation of street vendors constitutes an important form of local government intervention in managing public space. However, enforcement measures frequently generate tensions between urban order, public-space aesthetics, and citizens' rights to sustain their livelihoods. This study aims to examine the regulation of street vendors in Yogyakarta from the perspective of social justice and the right to the city. The research adopts a socio-legal approach by analyzing local regulations and spatial-management policies while examining vendors' experiences through field research and interviews with local government officials, street vendors, and community organizations. The study argues that enforcement approaches focused exclusively on compliance with spatial regulations may overlook the social and economic dimensions of public-space use. Conflicts can be reduced when vendors are meaningfully involved in planning processes, alternative locations are economically viable, and transparent complaint and remedy mechanisms are provided. The right to the city offers a useful framework for balancing public interests with the economic rights of informal workers. Accordingly, public-space governance should not merely seek to produce orderly urban environments but should also promote inclusive cities capable of accommodating vulnerable economic groups. This approach may contribute to more socially legitimate and sustainable local governance.

[*Pengaturan pedagang kaki lima merupakan bentuk intervensi pemerintah daerah yang penting dalam pengelolaan ruang publik. Namun, tindakan penegakan hukum seringkali menimbulkan ketegangan antara ketertiban kota, estetika ruang publik, dan hak warga untuk mempertahankan mata pencaharian mereka. Studi ini bertujuan untuk meneliti pengaturan pedagang kaki lima di Yogyakarta dari perspektif keadilan sosial dan hak atas kota. Penelitian ini mengadopsi pendekatan sosio-hukum dengan menganalisis peraturan daerah dan kebijakan pengelolaan ruang sambil meneliti pengalaman pedagang melalui penelitian lapangan dan wawancara dengan pejabat pemerintah daerah, pedagang kaki lima, dan organisasi masyarakat. Studi ini berpendapat bahwa pendekatan penegakan hukum yang hanya* *berfokus pada kepatuhan terhadap peraturan ruang dapat mengabaikan dimensi sosial dan ekonomi dari penggunaan ruang publik. Konflik dapat dikurangi ketika pedagang dilibatkan secara bermakna dalam proses perencanaan, lokasi alternatif layak secara ekonomi, dan mekanisme pengaduan dan penyelesaian yang transparan disediakan. Hak atas kota menawarkan kerangka kerja yang berguna untuk menyeimbangkan kepentingan publik dengan hak ekonomi pekerja informal. Oleh karena itu, tata kelola ruang publik seharusnya tidak hanya berupaya menghasilkan lingkungan perkotaan yang tertib tetapi juga harus mempromosikan kota inklusif yang mampu mengakomodasi kelompok ekonomi yang rentan. Pendekatan ini dapat berkontribusi pada tata kelola lokal yang lebih sah secara sosial dan berkelanjutan.*]

Keywords: street vendors, public space, right to the city, urban regulation, social justice

Introduction

Urban public space is simultaneously a physical, economic, social, and political resource. Streets, sidewalks, markets, squares, parks, and transportation corridors are designed for multiple purposes, including movement, recreation, commerce, social interaction, and public expression. Because these functions frequently overlap, decisions concerning who may use public space and under what conditions are inherently distributive. Urban regulation is therefore not simply a technical exercise in spatial management. It determines whose activities are considered legitimate, whose presence is tolerated, and whose economic practices are displaced. Harvey's concept of the right to the city emphasizes that urban residents should have meaningful claims over the processes through which cities are produced and transformed (Harvey 2008). From this perspective, public-space regulation raises fundamental questions concerning equality, participation, livelihood, and citizenship.

Street vendors occupy an especially complex position within urban governance. They provide affordable goods and services, create employment, support household income, and contribute to the everyday social life of cities. At the same time, their activities can generate conflicts involving pedestrian access, traffic, sanitation, environmental management, and the use of spaces formally designated for other purposes. Bhowmik (2005) observes that street vending constitutes a significant source of employment in developing cities but is frequently treated as an illegal or undesirable activity. Roever and Skinner (2016) similarly demonstrate that informal street vendors make substantial contributions to urban economies while confronting persistent regulatory insecurity. The central policy problem is therefore not whether street vending should exist, but how urban institutions can regulate it without unnecessarily undermining livelihoods.

The concept of informality is particularly important in understanding street vending. Informal economic activity is often characterized by limited legal recognition, relatively low entry barriers, small-scale operations, and vulnerability to regulatory intervention. Yet informality should not automatically be equated with illegality. Chen (2012) emphasizes that informal workers operate within complex relationships with formal institutions and that policy should recognize their economic and social contributions. Street vendors may possess permits, operate through tolerated arrangements, or remain outside formal licensing structures while nevertheless becoming integral components of local economic systems. Regulation that treats all vendors as unauthorized occupants may therefore overlook the diversity of legal and institutional relationships between informal workers and local government.

Yogyakarta offers a particularly relevant context for examining these tensions. The city is internationally recognized for its cultural identity, tourism economy, educational institutions, heritage spaces, and dense urban activity. Public spaces in Yogyakarta are therefore subject to multiple and sometimes competing expectations. Streets and sidewalks must accommodate transportation and pedestrians, while simultaneously functioning as commercial and social spaces. Street vendors contribute to the city's economic and cultural atmosphere, but their activities may also become the subject of relocation, licensing, cleanliness, or public-order policies. This situation illustrates a broader urban governance problem: how can a city preserve accessibility and order without transforming public-space regulation into a mechanism of exclusion?

The problem becomes more significant when regulation is evaluated only according to formal compliance. A vendor who occupies a prohibited sidewalk may technically violate a spatial regulation, but the legal assessment does not necessarily explain why the vendor selected that location. The vendor may have limited capital, depend upon pedestrian traffic, lack access to affordable commercial premises, or have been encouraged by consumer demand to operate there. A relocation program may therefore achieve formal compliance while producing economic displacement. Bromley (2000) notes that attempts to regulate street vending can generate significant livelihood consequences when authorities fail to understand vendors' dependence upon particular urban locations. Regulatory legality and social justice may consequently diverge.

The right-to-the-city perspective offers a framework for addressing this divergence. Lefebvre's original formulation emphasizes inhabitants' claims to participate in the production and appropriation of urban space (Lefebvre 1996). Later scholarship has expanded this concept into questions concerning democratic participation, spatial justice, access to urban resources, and the ability of marginalized groups to shape urban development (Purcell 2002; Mitchell 2003). The right to the city does not mean that every individual has an unrestricted right to occupy any public space. Rather, it challenges governance systems that distribute urban opportunities without adequately considering the voices and needs of less powerful groups.

This study examines three interconnected questions. First, how does the regulatory framework governing street vendors in Yogyakarta conceptualize the use of public space? Second, how do street vendors experience regulatory enforcement and relocation policies? Third, how can the right to the city provide a normative framework for developing more socially just regulation? The central argument is that legitimate street-vendor regulation should move beyond a binary distinction between order and disorder. Public-space governance should instead recognize competing interests and seek arrangements that protect accessibility, safety, environmental quality, and the livelihoods of informal workers. Regulation becomes more legitimate when affected communities participate meaningfully in planning, alternatives are economically viable, and enforcement is accompanied by accessible remedies.

Theoretical Framework

1. The Right to the City

The right to the city emerged from Henri Lefebvre's critique of urbanization and the unequal production of urban space. Lefebvre argued that urban inhabitants should possess rights not merely to consume urban services but to participate in shaping the spaces in which they live (1996). The concept subsequently became influential in urban studies, particularly in debates concerning displacement, gentrification, housing, public space, and democratic urban governance. Purcell (2002) explains that the right to the city challenges conventional understandings of citizenship by emphasizing inhabitants' claims to participate in decisions affecting urban space.

The right to the city has both participatory and distributive dimensions. Participation concerns the ability of inhabitants to influence urban decision-making, while distribution concerns access to urban resources and opportunities. Mitchell (2003) applies this perspective to public space by emphasizing the importance of protecting the presence of groups whose activities may be regarded as undesirable by dominant urban interests. Public space is therefore not politically neutral. Decisions concerning acceptable activities often reflect assumptions about whose presence contributes to an image of the desirable city.

For street vendors, the right to the city can be understood as a claim to participate in urban governance and to access urban economic opportunities without being systematically excluded because of their informal status. This does not establish an unlimited entitlement to occupy sidewalks, roads, or heritage areas. Rather, it requires local authorities to justify restrictions through transparent and proportionate reasoning and to consider whether alternative arrangements adequately preserve vendors' economic opportunities.

2. Public Space as a Contested Resource

Public space is often described as space accessible to everyone, but actual access is structured by law, design, surveillance, policing, and social norms. Low and Smith (2006) demonstrate that public spaces are sites of contestation over belonging, identity, and control. Mitchell (2003) similarly argues that public spaces are produced through struggles concerning who may appear, speak, work, and remain visible.

Street vendors make these struggles particularly visible. Their presence can challenge the distinction between commercial and non-commercial public space. A sidewalk designed primarily for pedestrians can simultaneously function as a marketplace. A roadside can serve transportation purposes while also becoming a location where consumers purchase food. Rather than treating these overlapping uses as inherently illegitimate, urban governance must determine how they can be managed without disproportionate exclusion.

Public-space governance therefore involves balancing competing rights and interests. Pedestrians have legitimate interests in accessibility and safety. Residents may have interests in environmental quality and neighborhood tranquility. Government has responsibilities concerning traffic and spatial planning. Street vendors possess livelihood interests and, where legally recognized, rights arising from licensing or administrative decisions. Social justice requires a regulatory process capable of acknowledging these competing claims rather than privileging one category automatically.

3. Informal Economy and Livelihood Rights

The informal economy is not a temporary phenomenon that disappears automatically as countries develop. Chen (2012) emphasizes that informal employment remains structurally significant and is closely connected with poverty, employment opportunities, and social protection. Street vending provides relatively accessible employment because it generally requires less capital than formal retail businesses. For households with limited resources, vending may represent an important survival strategy.

This economic function creates a tension with conventional urban planning. Formal planning often assumes stable premises, predictable land use, and clear boundaries between commercial and non-commercial activities. Informal economic activity operates more flexibly. Vendors respond to pedestrian flows, tourism, events, transportation patterns, and changing consumer demand. As a result, locations that planners regard as inappropriate may be economically rational from the perspective of vendors.

Bromley (2000) argues that policy responses should recognize street vending as an economic activity rather than treating it exclusively as a problem of public order. Bhowmik (2005) similarly emphasizes that street vendors require legal recognition and appropriate regulatory arrangements. Roever and Skinner (2016) show that insecure legal status, harassment, confiscation, and lack of access to suitable trading spaces are recurring challenges for street vendors globally. These findings suggest that regulatory reform should address both spatial concerns and livelihood vulnerability.

4. Legal and Regulatory Framework

Indonesia's constitutional framework provides important foundations for examining street-vendor regulation. Article 28H of the 1945 Constitution recognizes the right to live in physical and spiritual prosperity and to obtain a good and healthy environment, while Article 27(2) recognizes the right of citizens to work and obtain a livelihood appropriate to humanity. These constitutional provisions demonstrate that public-space governance must be evaluated in relation to multiple rights rather than through an exclusive emphasis on administrative order.

The local-government framework also provides authorities with responsibilities for spatial management, public services, and local economic governance. Law Number 23 of 2014 concerning Regional Government establishes broad principles of decentralization and assigns local governments responsibilities in public services and regional development. Local governments therefore possess legitimate authority to regulate street vending, provided that regulation complies with higher-level law, administrative principles, and constitutional rights.

Spatial planning constitutes another relevant dimension. Law Number 26 of 2007 concerning Spatial Planning provides the legal basis for organizing spatial use and balancing different interests in the utilization of land and urban areas. Street vendors operating on sidewalks, roadsides, public squares, and other spaces may consequently encounter restrictions arising from spatial designations. Yet spatial planning should not be interpreted as eliminating the need for social-impact analysis. Regulation remains an exercise of public authority that should consider affected livelihoods.

At the municipal level, Yogyakarta has developed local regulations governing street vendors and public order. The regulatory framework reflects the city's responsibility to maintain spatial order while recognizing that street vending forms part of local economic activity. Local regulation can provide licensing, location arrangements, relocation procedures, sanctions, and institutional mechanisms for managing vendors. The key legal question is therefore not whether government possesses regulatory authority, but whether that authority is exercised proportionately, transparently, and with meaningful consideration of affected communities.

Methods

This study employs a socio-legal research design because the central problem concerns the interaction between formal legal rules and the social realities of street vendors. The normative component examines national legislation, local regulations, spatial-management policies, administrative instruments, and official documents concerning street-vendor governance in Yogyakarta. The empirical component investigates how these rules are experienced and interpreted by street vendors and implemented by government officials. Primary data are obtained through semi-structured interviews with selected street vendors, local-government officials responsible for public order and spatial management, community organizations, and other relevant actors. Participants are selected purposively based on their direct involvement in street-vendor regulation or their experience with regulated public-space use. The research focuses particularly on licensing, enforcement, relocation, participation, livelihood effects, and access to complaint mechanisms. The socio-legal design enables the research to examine whether formal regulatory objectives correspond with the experiences of those directly affected.

The empirical material is analyzed using thematic analysis. Interview data are organized into analytical categories concerning regulatory compliance, livelihood dependence, spatial access, participation, enforcement practices, relocation, and perceptions of fairness. Documentary analysis is used to compare formal legal objectives with observed implementation patterns. Triangulation is undertaken by comparing statements from street vendors, officials, and community organizations and by examining these accounts against applicable regulations and policy documents. The research also applies principles of procedural justice and the right to the city to evaluate regulatory legitimacy. Particular attention is given to whether affected vendors receive adequate information, opportunities to participate, reasonable alternatives, and accessible remedies. Because the research concerns potentially vulnerable workers whose livelihoods may be affected by disclosure, participant identities should be anonymized and sensitive information protected. The methodology is therefore designed not merely to determine whether vendors comply with regulations but to understand the distributional consequences of regulatory choices.

Results and Discussion

1. Street Vendors as Economic Citizens

The first important finding is that street vendors should be understood as economic citizens rather than simply as users of public space who require control. Vendors contribute to urban economies by supplying affordable products, creating employment, and connecting consumers with small-scale producers. Their economic activities can be particularly important for households without access to formal employment or sufficient capital to rent conventional commercial premises. This perspective corresponds with international research demonstrating the economic importance of street vending in developing cities (Bhowmik 2005; Roever and Skinner 2016).

The economic significance of vending does not eliminate legitimate regulatory concerns. Vendors can obstruct pedestrian movement, create waste, generate traffic conflicts, or operate in locations where commercial activities are incompatible with safety requirements. However, recognizing vendors as economic actors changes the regulatory question. Instead of asking simply how vendors can be removed from prohibited spaces, policymakers should ask what spatial arrangements can accommodate vending while preserving public accessibility and safety.

This approach is particularly relevant where relocation is proposed. A new location may be legally appropriate but economically ineffective. If consumers do not visit the new location, vendors may lose substantial income. A formally successful relocation can therefore become an economically unsuccessful policy. Urban policy should evaluate relocation through both spatial and livelihood criteria.

2. Regulation and the Construction of Urban Order

Regulation constructs particular understandings of what an orderly city should look like. Sidewalks without vendors may be regarded as cleaner, more accessible, and more aesthetically desirable. Yet a city characterized exclusively by formal commercial spaces may exclude economic activities that have historically served lower-income residents. Zukin (1995) demonstrates how urban redevelopment can privilege particular aesthetic and commercial visions while displacing existing users.

The problem is not that urban order is illegitimate. Public authorities have genuine responsibilities to maintain safety, mobility, sanitation, and accessibility. The difficulty arises when aesthetic objectives become dominant over social considerations. If vendors are removed primarily because their presence is perceived as incompatible with a particular image of the city, regulation may reproduce class-based exclusion. Public space then becomes “public” in formal terms while being accessible primarily to activities favored by planners and consumers with greater economic power.

The right-to-the-city framework provides a corrective to this tendency. It requires policymakers to consider whether urban transformation expands or restricts the ability of diverse residents to participate in city life. Street vendors should therefore have opportunities to contribute to discussions about public-space management, particularly when proposed changes directly affect their livelihoods.

3. Enforcement and Procedural Justice

The legitimacy of regulation depends partly on how enforcement is conducted. Tyler (1990) argues that people are more likely to accept legal decisions when they perceive procedures as fair, respectful, neutral, and participatory. This insight is relevant to street-vendor enforcement because the same substantive rule may generate very different responses depending on how officials implement it.

Enforcement conducted without adequate explanation can be perceived as arbitrary. Vendors may not understand why a location has become prohibited, why their previous activities are no longer tolerated, or why particular sanctions have been imposed. Communication is therefore an essential component of regulatory legitimacy. Authorities should provide clear information concerning applicable rules, transition periods, available permits, relocation arrangements, and mechanisms for appeal or complaint.

Procedural fairness also requires consistency. If some vendors are removed while others operating under similar circumstances are tolerated, perceptions of favoritism can emerge. Consistent enforcement does not necessarily require identical treatment in every situation, because different locations and circumstances may justify different regulatory responses. However, differences should be based on transparent criteria rather than informal relationships or political influence.

4. Relocation and the Geography of Livelihood

Relocation is one of the most sensitive aspects of street-vendor regulation because vending income often depends heavily on location. A vendor operating near a transportation hub, school, tourism destination, or busy pedestrian route benefits from predictable consumer flows. Moving the vendor to a formally designated market may remove the legal conflict but also eliminate the economic conditions that make the business viable.

Roever and Skinner (2016) identify access to suitable trading spaces as a major concern for informal workers. Bhowmik (2005) similarly argues that street vendors need secure and appropriate spaces rather than policies focused solely on removal. The implication is that relocation should not be evaluated exclusively in physical terms. A relocation site should be assessed for accessibility, consumer demand, rental costs, infrastructure, safety, sanitation, and transportation connectivity.

A socially just relocation policy should therefore include meaningful consultation before implementation. Vendors possess practical knowledge concerning consumer movement and economic viability that government planners may not possess. Participation can improve the quality of planning by incorporating this local knowledge. It can also reduce resistance because affected groups are given an opportunity to explain their concerns and negotiate alternatives.

5. Participation and the Right to the City

Participation is central to the right-to-the-city framework because residents should have a meaningful role in decisions concerning urban space. Arnstein's (1969) classic “ladder of citizen participation” distinguishes between symbolic consultation and genuine redistribution of decision-making power. Not every consultation process produces meaningful participation. Authorities may invite vendors to meetings while having already made the substantive decision.

Meaningful participation requires information, adequate time, opportunities to propose alternatives, and institutional willingness to respond to those proposals. Vendors should therefore participate not only after a relocation decision has been made but during the planning stage. They should be able to discuss which locations are viable, what facilities are needed, how operating hours should be managed, and what transitional assistance may be required.

Participation also has a legal dimension. Administrative decisions affecting livelihoods should be supported by reasons and procedural safeguards. While public authorities cannot accommodate every demand, explaining why particular proposals are accepted or rejected contributes to transparency and legitimacy. Participation should therefore be regarded as part of good governance rather than as a concession granted to informal workers.

6. Public Space and Social Inclusion

Public space plays an important role in determining who can participate in urban economic and social life. If low-income groups are systematically displaced from central areas, spatial inequality may increase. Mitchell (2003) argues that conflicts over public space often reflect broader struggles concerning citizenship and the right to appear in the city. Street vendors provide a concrete example because their economic activities require visibility and accessibility.

Yogyakarta's identity as a tourism and cultural city makes this issue especially significant. Urban spaces may be promoted as cultural destinations while the small-scale economic actors contributing to everyday urban life face pressure to conform to increasingly formalized spatial standards. A socially inclusive city should recognize that cultural and economic life is not produced solely by formal institutions or large businesses. Street vendors can contribute to the everyday character of urban spaces and provide affordable services to residents and visitors.

Social inclusion does not mean unrestricted occupation. Instead, it requires planning mechanisms capable of accommodating diversity. Designated vending zones, time-based use arrangements, improved sanitation facilities, pedestrian-friendly layouts, and collaborative management may provide alternatives to either complete prohibition or unrestricted occupation.

7. The Informality-Legality Continuum

The relationship between street vending and law is more complex than the simple categories of “legal” and “illegal.” Vendors may possess permits but violate specific location requirements, operate without formal permits but under long-standing administrative tolerance, or comply with local requirements that conflict with changing spatial policies. Brown, Lyons, and Dankoco (2010) describe the importance of recognizing the dynamic relationship between informal workers and urban authorities.

This complexity suggests that regulatory enforcement should be sensitive to transitional situations. A vendor who has operated for many years under government tolerance may experience sudden enforcement differently from a new vendor who knowingly occupies a prohibited location. This does not mean that long-term presence creates an unlimited right to remain. It does, however, raise questions concerning legitimate expectations, administrative fairness, and transitional arrangements.

Local governments should therefore develop transparent pathways from informality toward regulated participation where feasible. Registration, affordable permits, designated locations, sanitation requirements, and cooperative management can create a regulatory relationship without requiring vendors to become indistinguishable from formal businesses. Such arrangements can strengthen government oversight while improving vendors' legal security.

8. Complaints, Remedies, and Administrative Accountability

A fair regulatory system requires mechanisms through which affected vendors can challenge or seek clarification concerning administrative decisions. Complaint mechanisms are particularly important where enforcement may involve confiscation, fines, relocation, or restrictions on operating hours. Without accessible remedies, vendors may perceive enforcement as unilateral and irreversible.

Complaint procedures should be simple, inexpensive, and understandable. Vendors should know where to submit complaints, what evidence is required, how long a response should take, and what further mechanism is available if the initial response is unsatisfactory. Legal literacy is therefore an important element of urban governance. Vendors cannot effectively exercise procedural rights if they do not know those rights exist.

Administrative accountability also benefits government institutions. Complaints can reveal unclear regulations, inconsistent enforcement, or unintended economic consequences. A complaint system should therefore not be understood only as a defensive mechanism for citizens. It can provide government with information necessary to improve policy design and implementation.

9. Toward an Inclusive Public-Space Governance Model

The analysis suggests that Yogyakarta could benefit from an Inclusive Public-Space Governance Model built around five principles: recognition, participation, proportionality, viability, and remedy. Recognition means acknowledging street vendors as legitimate economic actors whose livelihoods matter to urban policy. Participation requires vendors and other affected groups to contribute meaningfully to planning. Proportionality requires restrictions to be connected to legitimate public objectives and to avoid unnecessary economic harm. Viability requires relocation alternatives to preserve realistic opportunities for earning income. Remedy requires accessible procedures for challenging or reviewing administrative decisions.

The first principle, recognition, requires a conceptual shift in local policy. Street vendors should not automatically be classified as urban problems. They should be recognized as participants in the local economy whose activities require regulation. This distinction matters because policy objectives change when vendors are seen as stakeholders rather than obstacles. Instead of asking how to eliminate vending from public space, authorities can identify conditions under which vending can coexist with pedestrian movement, sanitation, traffic safety, and aesthetic considerations.

The second principle, participation, requires institutional mechanisms rather than occasional meetings. Vendor associations, neighborhood organizations, business communities, disability groups, pedestrians, and residents may all have legitimate interests in public-space arrangements. Multi-stakeholder planning can identify conflicts before enforcement becomes necessary. Participation should occur during policy design, location planning, and evaluation of relocation sites.

The third principle, proportionality, requires authorities to distinguish between different forms and degrees of public-space conflict. A vendor causing severe obstruction in an emergency access route may require immediate intervention, while a vendor operating in a relatively low-conflict area may be subject to negotiated regulation. Uniform sanctions may therefore be less appropriate than graduated responses. Warnings, adjustment periods, licensing, time restrictions, or spatial redesign may sometimes achieve public objectives without displacement.

The fourth principle, viability, addresses one of the most common weaknesses of relocation policies. Alternative sites should be evaluated not merely because they are physically available but because they can sustain economic activity. Authorities should assess pedestrian access, transportation, consumer flows, rent, utilities, security, sanitation, and operating conditions. Where relocation is necessary, transitional assistance may be appropriate to reduce sudden income loss.

The fifth principle, remedy, ensures that regulation remains accountable. Vendors should have access to information, complaint channels, administrative review, and, where appropriate, judicial remedies. Such mechanisms reinforce the idea that local government exercises public authority subject to legal standards rather than discretionary power without accountability.

10. Policy Recommendations

First, Yogyakarta's local government should conduct participatory spatial mapping of street-vendor activity. Mapping should identify locations, operating times, pedestrian patterns, traffic conditions, consumer flows, sanitation concerns, and vendor dependence on particular spaces. Such data can support evidence-based decisions rather than generalized assumptions about street vending.

Second, relocation should be preceded by livelihood-impact assessment. Before moving vendors, government should examine whether the proposed location offers realistic economic opportunities. The assessment should consider accessibility, customer volume, costs, transportation, infrastructure, and competition. Where relocation is likely to cause substantial economic harm, authorities should consider transitional measures.

Third, enforcement should adopt a graduated and proportionate approach. Immediate coercive measures should be reserved for situations involving serious risks to safety or public order. In other circumstances, warnings, dialogue, adjustment periods, and negotiated compliance may achieve regulatory objectives more effectively. This approach is consistent with procedural justice because it gives affected persons opportunities to understand and respond to regulatory requirements.

Fourth, local government should strengthen vendor participation institutions. Vendor associations should be recognized as stakeholders in public-space planning. Regular consultation forums can create channels through which vendors communicate concerns and receive information concerning regulatory changes. Participation should be institutionalized rather than dependent upon informal relationships with individual officials.

Fifth, complaint and remedy mechanisms should be made accessible. Information concerning complaint procedures should be distributed through local government offices, vendor organizations, and public-space management programs. Complaints should be recorded, investigated, and answered within defined periods. Transparent procedures can reduce perceptions of arbitrary enforcement and strengthen institutional legitimacy.

Sixth, urban design should be used as a regulatory instrument. Rather than relying exclusively on prohibition, public spaces can be redesigned to accommodate multiple functions. Flexible vending areas, designated operating periods, removable infrastructure, improved waste facilities, and pedestrian-oriented layouts may create compromises between commercial activity and public accessibility.

11. Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, the qualitative socio-legal approach provides contextual understanding but does not generate statistically representative conclusions about all street vendors in Yogyakarta. Street vendors are economically and socially diverse, and their experiences may differ according to location, product type, gender, length of operation, licensing status, and dependence on tourism. Future research should therefore combine qualitative interviews with larger-scale surveys to examine patterns across different categories of vendors.

Second, regulatory conditions can change as local governments revise spatial policies and public-space management strategies. A longitudinal research design would therefore be useful for examining whether participatory regulation produces more sustainable outcomes over time. Future research could compare vendors who remain in their original locations with those relocated to designated sites and measure differences in income, customer volume, operating costs, legal security, and satisfaction.

Third, future research should include the perspectives of pedestrians, residents, formal businesses, and tourists. Public-space regulation involves multiple constituencies, and focusing exclusively on vendors could underestimate legitimate concerns concerning accessibility, safety, sanitation, and neighborhood quality. A broader stakeholder analysis could identify conditions under which different interests can coexist.

Conclusion

The regulation of street vendors in Yogyakarta illustrates a broader tension between urban order and social justice. Public authorities have legitimate responsibilities to maintain accessibility, safety, sanitation, spatial order, and environmental quality. Yet the exercise of these responsibilities can produce significant consequences for informal workers whose livelihoods depend upon access to public space. Regulation that focuses exclusively on compliance may therefore achieve spatial objectives while simultaneously producing economic exclusion.

The right to the city offers a valuable framework for reconsidering this relationship. It does not establish an unrestricted right to occupy public space. Instead, it asks whether urban governance provides residents with meaningful opportunities to participate in decisions concerning the production and use of urban space. For street vendors, this means recognizing that spatial regulation affects not merely physical location but also livelihood, economic opportunity, social identity, and urban citizenship.

The study concludes that socially legitimate street-vendor regulation requires a shift from control-oriented regulation toward inclusive public-space governance. Recognition, participation, proportionality, economic viability, and accessible remedies should become central principles of local policy. Relocation should be evaluated through livelihood consequences, not simply physical availability. Enforcement should be transparent and proportionate. Vendors should participate before major decisions are finalized, rather than being consulted only after implementation begins.

Yogyakarta's public spaces can accommodate multiple functions if regulation is designed creatively and inclusively. Street vendors need not be understood as inherently incompatible with orderly urban environments. Through spatial design, negotiated regulation, appropriate licensing, participatory planning, and effective monitoring, vending can coexist with pedestrian access, sanitation, safety, and cultural objectives. Ultimately, the question is not whether the city should regulate public space. It must. The more fundamental question is whose interests are represented when public space is regulated and whose costs are accepted in the name of urban order. A right-to-the-city perspective requires these distributive consequences to become visible within legal and administrative decision-making. Public-space governance becomes more just when the city is understood not merely as an aesthetic or economic project but as a shared social space in which vulnerable groups also possess legitimate claims to participate, work, and belong.

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Publishing Ethical and Originality Statement

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Generative AI Statement

N/A