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The Art of Crafting Formal-Informal Linkages: On the Enduring Appeal of Belo Horizonte's Hippie Fair

Peter Mörtenböck and Helge Mooshammer

While informal markets arguably have a long history as arenas of economic self-help of one kind or another, in recent times there has been a noticeable shift when it comes to the ways political and administrative authorities deal with these spatialized networks of bottom-up entrepreneurialism. The publication in 1973 of an article by anthropologist and self-taught economist Keith Hart on the high level of completely unregistered economic activity in the slums of the Ghanaian capital of Accra (Hart 1973) was instrumental in introducing the notion of an “informal sector” into debates among development professionals. In the following decades, the majority of policy responses to such informality were geared toward a single strategy of “integration,” i.e., making these activities conform to the requirements and regulations of the dominant economic order. Although Keith Hart’s own approach had been more open-minded and the principal impetus of his studies had been to “draw attention to activities that had previously been invisible to the bureaucratic gaze” rather than to coin a concept, the “informal economy” has subsequently become “a keyword helping to organize a segment of the academic and policy-making bureaucracy” (Hart 2015). This bureaucratic

absorption of the concept of the informal economy, which has led to often forcefully enacted measures to combat informal economic activities on the ground, has largely been based on the assumption that—as a flagship report by the World Bank on Latin America and the Caribbean in 2007 still put it—informality is counterproductive when it comes to enabling investment climates and thus acts as “a drag on growth” (Perry et al. 2007, 22).

Increasingly though, governments around the world are signing up to the idea that the source of a new and perhaps different kind of growth may lie precisely in “informal”—that is, self-initiated and deeply socially structured—milieus that foster bottom-up explorations of novel entrepreneurial activities. An unholy marriage between, on the one hand, the fallout of the global financial crisis of 2007–08, which has led to severe austerity measures and massive cutbacks in social services in many parts of the world, and on the other, the allure of beguiling success stories of informally born start-ups that turn into global market disruptors seemingly overnight has generated a new willingness to abandon old administrative patterns geared toward forcing everyone to conform to the prevalent economic paradigm and to open up the policy toolbox to novel ways of instigating new forms of economic organization. From the initiation of a range of comprehensive and multifaceted programs aimed at consolidating the business foundation of family entrepreneurs active in the popular economy¹ to the promotion of all sorts of themed and carefully orchestrated pop-up market places, we are seeing a whole new wave of support for low-key “informal” places of exchange. Physical urban markets are no longer only understood as odd economic remnants tolerated because they function as valves for pressures from the lower end of the economic pyramid, but are being increasingly embraced as incubators of change and future prospects.

One of the largest street markets in Latin America, officially registered as the Feira de Arte, Artesanato e Produtores de Variedades da Avenida Afonso Pensa (Arts, Crafts and

Variety Products Fair on Avenida Afonso Pena), but colloquially known as the Hippie Fair (Feira Hippie), takes place every Sunday in the center of Belo Horizonte, the capital of the Brazilian state of Minas Gerais. The history of its social, economic, and spatio-urban transformation over the last half century is indicative of wider changes in how urban markets are understood and sheds light on how the global economic and political volatility of the last decade has generated new cultural and political pressures to (re)capture the energy of marketplaces as sites of more easily accessible economic opportunities, as well as of encounters with the new and unknown, potentially harboring new sources of prosperity and generally improving the quality of urban life. From its inconspicuous beginnings as a marginal space of 1960s countercultural experience, Belo Horizonte's Feira Hippie has grown into a major distribution point for the global shadow trade in cheap mass-produced knickknacks and knockoffs. The current tensions around the market's official arts-and-crafts orientation and the regulatory commitment to local authenticity, which stand in stark contrast to the actual display of overwhelmingly low-quality, throwaway goods, highlight not only the divergence of interests between local middle-class residents and the city's poor, who come to the centrally located market from a ring of peripheral favelas primarily as a way of having a cheap day out, but also the broader question of how the path to future economic development is to be delineated. In this respect, the story of the Feira Hippie and the changing fate of its organizers, traders, and customers, which is playing out in the cultural narrative, political framing, and architectural set-up of the market, is also a story about the clash between the idea of an economy of free-flowing global trade and local protectionism, between subscribing to consumer demands and cultivating authentic craftsmanship, and between enforcing hegemonic market interests and embarking on new models of formal-informal linkages.

Incorporating Informality

Informal markets often arise on the fault lines inscribed by global alliances of money and power: wars and humanitarian crises, national and infrastructural borders, the worldwide trade in waste, and the marginal spaces of urban transformation (Mörtenböck and Mooshammer 2015). They act as globalization's safety valve while also providing livelihoods for millions of people trading in the streets of cities around the world. Informal markets represent a globally distributed yet often stigmatized economic practice that is orientated toward concrete opportunities and whose local differences cannot be understood from either a uniform overall perspective or a purely local one. This practice is rather the expression of an economic setting in which forces of differing dimensions and ranges converge and create new market conventions. Seen in this way, different types of informality can be understood as characteristic patterns of transaction through which different spaces and economies are brought together (Roy 2005, 148).

Today, informal marketplaces are not only experiencing increasing pressure from state and corporate actors, but also a change in the orientation of this pressure. The last two decades of globalization, in conjunction with the recent economic crisis and emerging forms of self-organized, peer-to-peer economies, have substantially altered the relationship between the informal and formal sector, both conceptually and practically. This change has been reflected in a revised understanding of the informal economy as an alternative, multifaceted mode of economic governance outside state regulation. It is also reflected in the recent rise of self-employment and increasing state support for start-ups, micro-businesses, social entrepreneurship, and peer-to-peer industries in countries of the Global North as well as the Global South.

The ongoing spatial transformation of informal markets is not only indicative of these macro-economic changes. It is also playing an instrumental role in the generation of new economic climates—signifying, in some cases, generative activity based on alternative knowledge and use of city services and land, and alternative livelihood strategies (Evers and Seale 2015), and in others, an expansion of the market economy’s reach into new territories, particularly within the framework of markets run by the poor in developing countries (Roy 2010). In this respect, informal markets are important sites of negotiation where new forms of interaction (shaped by technological and organizational changes) between state and non-state actors pursuing different political and economic interests are explored.

In light of these developments, this text examines distinct incorporations of informality in the urban economic realm—both in the sense of absorbing the economic capacities of informal activities into the formal realm, and in the sense of adopting informal methods in carrying out activities in the formal urban economy. While for reasons of argumentative strategy we use the terms “formal” and “informal” as distinct categories in this text, it is important to point out that there is no clear-cut binary of “formal” and “informal” economic conduct. Both terms reflect particular roles assigned within a continuous economic fabric. Although often characterized by uneven power relations, the distinction between “formal” and “informal” is not necessarily synonymous with the disparity between the wealthy and the poor. There is “informality from above,” just as there is “informality from below” (Ribeiro 2006); there is “elite informality,” just as there is “subaltern informality” (Roy 2005, 147). And there are degrees of planning, order, deliberations, and protocols involved in informal markets, just as there are in formal markets. Against this background, the term “integration” often masks a range of extra-market processes, ideologically biased goals, and purpose-driven interventions that are central to the ongoing creation of a global market and economic standardization (Humphrey and Skvirskaja 2012). For these reasons it is necessary to not only

look at the direct and overt strategies of transforming informal marketplaces but also at the political and social undercurrents linked with the struggle to control these sites and to benefit from their economic informality.

In order to address the accelerating hybridization of formal and informal economic practices in the pursuit of new market opportunities, we will focus here on the transformations underway at one of Latin America's largest open-air markets, Belo Horizonte's "Hippie Fair." Belying its uniform and ordered appearance, the fair's multi-actor structure highlights the proliferation of formal-informal linkages that affect not only street vendors, manufacturers, and administrative bodies, but also millions of people who use this inner-city space as an opportunity to engage in all kinds of exchange. Many people come here regularly to spend their Sunday meeting friends, listening to samba music, hunting for bargains, strolling around, chatting with vendors, and enjoying cheap food and drinks. If one is looking for economic informality, it can be found at the Hippie Fair in many different variants: as entrepreneurial or survivalist strategy, as support structure, as business innovator, as time-saver, or as stopgap solution. With its almost seamless transition between informal and formal economic practices, the fair has effectively turned a busy traffic corridor into a safe and much-frequented inner-city place of encounter between many different segments of the population.

From a neoliberal perspective as well as in the perception of many formal-sector actors, the most attractive achievement of informal marketplaces is the creation of new market environments—places for trade and commerce—that can offer opportunities for economic growth. However, policy approaches to the integration of the economic potential of informal marketplaces differ widely, ranging from market closures and relocations to structural upgrades and the transformation of informal markets into closely regulated shopping

environments, regardless of their role as a crucial lifeline for millions of people at the bottom of the economic pyramid (Mörtenböck and Mooshammer 2015). While in the past, informality has often been seen as an inferior condition associated with low productivity—as a “drag on growth”—reviews of contemporary policy practices are pointing toward a revised understanding of the relationship between the formal and informal sectors in terms of participants and *modi operandi*, as well as emergent strategies of resistance.² What is at stake in this change is not just a different way of dealing with the informal sector, but—through the proliferation of formal-informal linkages—a paradigm shift affecting many contemporary systems of socio-economic stratification.

With the informal economy estimated to account for more than half of all nonagricultural activities in large parts of the world (International Labour Organization 2013), we are seeing increased interest across the political spectrum in accessing the potential of the informal economy by integrating its entrepreneurial energies, assets, and networks into wider economic circuits.³ Attesting to this growing interest, the development of many informal marketplaces across Latin America has been characterized by a variety of attempts at integration. Besides juridical (trade licenses, rights of use, etc.), financial (access to credit, poverty alleviation, etc.) and organizational measures (access to piped water, electricity supply, agreements with informal workers’ unions, etc.), such attempts often revolve around spatial organization and range from the forced removal and relocation of informal markets to urban fringes or the dispersal of market activities into other neighborhoods, to the demarcation of dedicated areas that do not interfere with formal business and the allocation of trading space in permanent market halls, where maintenance and services are provided on a fee-for-service basis. It is worth noting here that street vendors, even though they are the ones most affected by the regulation and management of informal trade, rarely feature in decision-making processes (Bhowmik 2005). Many “integration” projects are thus still governed by an

authoritative, paternalistic concept of realigning the workings of informal economic activities and making them fully compliant with the requirements of the formal economy (Chen, Rover, and Skinner 2016).

From Counterculture to Global Market Integration

Every Sunday, the majestic Avenida Afonso Pena in the center of Belo Horizonte is closed to traffic and transformed into one of Latin America's largest open-air markets, attracting an average of seventy thousand visitors. From the early hours onwards, workers start to assemble more than 2,500 modular tents. Groupings of uniformly colored tarpaulins form radiant blocks of red, blue, green, and yellow, which contrast with the lush tropical green of the Américo Renné Giannetti municipal park on one side and the strict lines of modernist tower blocks on the other. Twelve rows deep and 220 units long, this spectacular parade stretches along the entire southwestern edge of the park. Viewed from afar, the market's strict order and bulky lineup, along one of the city's most prominent thoroughfares, resembles a top-down, organized demonstration more than the gathering of an alternative market, as the "Hippie Fair" label might suggest.

Staging the six-hundred-meter-long fair every Sunday is an elaborate process, the study of which was the focus of local artist Lucas Dupin's six-month-long participation in the Bolsa Pampulha 2016 residency program. Amongst the multifarious materials produced during his artistic investigations is a subtly edited video piece that depicts the concerted phases and intricate interactions involved in getting the 2,500 stalls ready in time for the market to open on Sunday mornings.⁴ Traders do not own or set up the tent structures themselves but rent

them on a daily or monthly basis from specialist operators charging between 60 and 100 reais per day depending on the size of the stall. Involving approximately 350 people, the entire setup of the market is controlled by around thirty groups of so-called “men with a van,” with the latter needed to ferry the numerous stall components from offsite storage spaces to the Avenida Afonso Pena in the city center. These storage spaces are often combined with small workshops, as most operations not only own and rent out the tent structures but also manufacture them, welding and bending the metal tubes into various shapes, sewing together differently colored tarpaulins, and adding various equipment for specialist stalls such as fridge components for food sellers or simpler items such as stools for traders.

Individual “men with a van” can be in charge of ten to two hundred tents, and as a result the market is divided into discrete patches that do not necessarily overlap with the official color-coded sections grouped according to different wares. Smaller patches are operated as one-person businesses while those commanding higher numbers of tents have additional “attendants” (*guardadores*) working for them, who help to set up the stalls and guard them until the handover to the traders in the morning. Usually, the first vans arrive around 11 p.m. on Saturdays and the helpers begin preassembling stalls on the sidewalks, before all the lanes of traffic are officially closed off between 2 a.m. and 3 a.m. on Sundays and they are allowed to move their work onto the street. As Lucas Dupin, one of our key informants on these processes, explains, a market attendant—who is paid 15 reais per assembled stall—can earn up to 400 reais in one night, and in the current economic climate of Brazil this work represents a highly valuable source of income that the people who have it are keen to safeguard. Similarly, those running the businesses providing the market infrastructure rigorously guard their patches with the help of male family members, who are involved in these operations from a very young age.

Focusing on these twilight aspects of market life, which are rarely acknowledged yet form an essential aspect of the market's ongoing existence, Lucas Dupin's video piece records the cyclical assembling and dismantling of the market's infrastructural skeleton, from the arrival of the vans and the off-loading of countless parts to the erection of the metal structures and the skillful throwing of the tarpaulin covers as day breaks, only to be followed by the reverse process when the market is taken down again at 6 p.m. on Sunday evenings. In tandem with the polyphonic soundscape of thousands of clunking metal tubes that accompanies the assembling of this massive 2,500-tent-strong fair, it becomes very tangible how the market's urban presence displays both powerful and ephemeral characteristics. The associated precariousness not only affects operations that are strongly dependent on the market, such as the tent suppliers, who recently have been seeking some measure of economic stability by forming an association, but as we will discuss later, has also been an inherent aspect of the market's existence, during which informal self-organization has been continuously exposed to often fundamentally game-changing bureaucratic interventions.

As the capital of the state of Minas Gerais and center of the eponymous mining industry, Belo Horizonte certainly has a history of monumental urban planning. The highly choreographed market setup occupies a central patch of the grandiose street plan of the city center, conceived by Aarão Reis shortly after Brazil became a republic in 1889. Reputedly inspired by the example of Washington DC, the plan is based on a striking rhombus pattern with a four-block-wide grid of diagonal avenues placed on top of a standard perpendicular grid of blocks, allowing for long vistas and a string of prestigious squares and parade grounds at its main intersections. Oriented toward a representative display of civic pride and republican institutions, the grand layout has also engendered a highly segregated urban fabric, with workers prevented from settling within the planned inner-city districts.

Nowadays, although its official name is the Feira de Arte, Artesanato e Produtores de Variedades da Avenida Afonso Pena, locals still refer to the market as the “Hippie Fair.” This colloquial name is a reference to the market’s idiosyncratic beginnings in 1969 as a gathering of art students, dropouts, and other alternative thinkers on Praça da Liberdade in Belo Horizonte’s main cultural quarter of Savassi. Following the Summer of Love of 1967, the hippie movement spread from US campuses to many university towns around the globe. The self-organized provision of alternative lifestyle accessories and aesthetic objects had become a common element in the hippie movement’s attempt to create a holistic counterculture that not only served leisure and entertainment but also experimental terrains for autonomous livelihoods. At the time, unsolicited assemblies by members of a dissenting younger generation were met with suspicion in most places, and the situation in Belo Horizonte was certainly no different. With the country under military rule since 1964, public manifestations in any Brazilian city were the sole preserve of power. Civil liberties and legal rights had been severely restricted (most notably through the suspension of habeas corpus—the right of arrestees to be brought before a judge or into court) and students and universities became primary targets of government forces after widespread protests in 1968.

When talking to vendors who have been involved in the fair for decades, we encountered diverging claims regarding the extent to which the initial group of hippie students and a few hundred artists and artisans who began to sell their works to a predominantly middle-class clientele every Sunday actually overlapped. What arguably contributed to the long-term survival of the market was the early takeover of its organization by the municipality of Belo Horizonte. In 1973, the city officially recognized the hippie fair in a decree on the regular holding of the “Liberty Fair,” laying down a whole set of conditions—repeatedly emphasizing, for instance, the prohibition on “pieces, works or productions that violate public morals and good customs”—as well as introducing yearly

license fees for exhibitors (Prefeitura de Belo Horizonte 1973). To ensure ideological compliance and to confront diffuse anxieties regarding the encroachment of radical nonacademic art and an uncontrollable indigenization as well as an influx of radical modernist, nonlocal art, the decree further ordered the appointment of a technical advisory committee with members drawn from the city council and from a list of renowned artists, art critics, and cultural representatives. The granting of exhibitor licenses was thereby subject to a prior examination of artistic credentials. Artists also had to opt for a particular material classification (metals, plastics, wood, hides, precious metals, semi-precious and precious stones, etc.) with works graded according to the material that either composed over 50 percent of their weight or represented over 50 percent of their value.

While for the municipality of Belo Horizonte—a city of considerable wealth as well as staggering social inequality—these conditions allowed for tighter direct control of the way the market functioned, it also instated a familiar instrumentalization of the arts as an appeasing cultural bond beyond conflictual class and political differences. Historically, the city's authorities have frequently utilized the popular notion of the city's outstanding artistic achievements and heritage. References range from the Pampulha complex in the north of the city (erected under Mayor Juscelino Kubitschek in the 1940s and for which a young Oscar Niemeyer was commissioned to design a series of now-iconic buildings)⁵ to the city's proximity to the world cultural heritage site of Ouro Preto and the nearby contemporary arts park of Inhotim.⁶ This reliance on the popular notion of Belo Horizonte as a seat of artistic richness and appreciation has framed political engagement with the fair since its inception and still informs the plane of negotiation today.

Regulation and Massification

Around 1975/76, a regular parallel fair for what was perceived as minor products was established on Thursdays. The mixed feelings around these changes are reflected in the amendment of the decree on the arts-and-crafts fair on Liberty Square from 1977, which now included, for instance, obligations “to enhance artistic and crafts research and produce highly creative works; to maintain a warm, friendly, and healthy environment; not to exhibit standardized garment products; and to refrain from imitating or copying models created by other exhibitors” (Prefeitura de Belo Horizonte 1977). In the early 1980s, a period of political favoritism reportedly corrupted the artistic foundation of the fair, with increasing numbers of licenses granted by “invitation” rather than as a result of the technical advisory committee’s review process.⁷ The reaction on the ground was an ever more anarchic appropriation of space. During the years of re-democratization after 1985, the alleged depredation of the historic gardens of Praça da Liberdade provided the pretext for instigating a change of venue and more tightly controlling the market. In fact, during this period many Latin American cities witnessed a so-called “fairing” of urban spaces, which began increasingly to serve as sites of subsistence work and informal trade. When the municipality of Belo Horizonte ordered the relocation of the Liberty Fair to Avenida Alonso Pena, it also shifted a number of other street markets that had sprung up on Praça Raul Soares, Rua Gonçalves Dias, and Praça Rui Barbosa to the same location—a process that cleared the inner city of Belo Horizonte of informal trading and resulted in the arts-and-crafts fair swelling to its current size.

Over the two decades since its relocation, the transformation of the market has been characterized by two main tendencies: on the one hand, an ever-stronger grip by the municipality on the market’s operation and, on the other, an increased orientation toward a low-end economy. Both developments are evident in the ongoing spatial restructuring of the

market. The twelve different divisions of the layout implemented in September 2013 comprise a total of 2,555 tents, of which 374 are earmarked for clothing, 204 for baby clothing, 340 for costume jewelry, 224 for bags, and 262 for shoes, but only 137 for fine art and sculpture, just a fraction above 5 percent of the total number of vending points. However, even before this, arts and crafts had literally become sidelined, with art vendors displaying their works not in tents but along the iron fence that encircles the municipal park and thus outside the main body of the market. On our visits to the market in 2012, these developments were clearly evident in the ways art vendors had been relegated to the margins of the market, their paintings fixed onto the railings of the park or placed on ad-hoc easels that could be moved quickly when required.

In official statements, there is still an insistence on the arts-and-crafts character of the market, though the inclusion of the rather diffuse classification of “producers of variety products” has opened up a considerable gray zone in terms of regulation and has in fact created a framework allowing for a continuous commercialization and takeover by manufactured goods, epitomized by the display of crude nudes and the sale of funky toilet seats. Increasing reference to the fair as *camelódromo* echoes the recognition that the market has turned into a locus of resale for *sacoleiros* shuttling in Chinese mass-produced wares from the border markets in Paraguay.⁸ On paper, the regulations and bylaws are supposed to safeguard the prevalence of arts and handicrafts, for instance by limiting the power of machinery used to produce items offered for sale to five kilowatts and by forbidding the sale of third-party products. In the annual license renewal process, stallholders are required to provide the address of their workshop and authorities are supposed to check regularly for evidence of craftsmanship, such as the amount of raw material in stock, the volume of weekly production, and the knowledge and skills required for all phases of production. Furthermore, the presence of a member of the license-holder’s family unit at the stalls is regularly checked

to ensure that family members are replaced by an employee or agent no more than eight times a year (Prefeitura de Belo Horizonte 2010). According to regulations, the right to operate a stall at the market cannot be passed down outside the immediate family line. Not even marital partners are entitled to enter into an existing contract with the municipality. Consequently, stallholders finding that their services or range of goods do not bring in enough money have often decided to rent their pitches to more profitable businesses, even if these shadow operations bear little relationship to the arts-and-crafts tradition of the market and have helped transform its character from a middle-class playground to a weekly festival strip catering to the broad masses, be they international tourists or favela residents.

While the city authorities claim that the overall annual expenditure involved in running the market is more than double the direct intake of taxes, there is also a recognition that the fair generates and supports around fifteen to twenty thousand jobs, directly through the fair itself and indirectly through the employment of assemblers, shippers, cleaners, and inspection staff, as well as through the high numbers of out-of-town visitors it attracts (Pimentel, de Pádua Carrieri, and Leite-Da-Silva 2007). In effect, the fair has come to be understood as an event compensating for Belo Horizonte's land-locked location and lack of a beach, which in many Brazilian cities is the main site of collective leisure activities. Events in general tend to emphasize or change the routine of a group of people. They can give a new character to a particular environment and promote particular activities. Belo Horizonte's Hippie Fair is no exception to this. It has become a major center of gravity for thousands of people enjoying a great day out in the city. And yet, in recent years there has been growing concern about the lack of attention given to the fair as a leisure destination. While a wide range of national fairs and congresses regularly held in this mining city receive generous government support to boost the local economy, the Hippie Fair, as vendors often lament, suffers major infrastructural problems—inadequate sanitation, no places for people to sit and rest, and a

lack of signage and policing to name but a few—that hamper not only the welfare of exhibitors but the entire urban milieu of the fair as a place for secure and pleasurable encounters between tourists, locals, and traders (de Castro Rodriguez 2008).

Moreover, a new wave of interest from economic institutions has been stimulated by the shift toward a low-end economy. While credit cooperatives such as Sicoob Divicred (a credit cooperative advertising itself as “more than a bank”) (Femeart 2013) are still the major providers of microfinance for the Hippie Fair, commercial banks have begun to scour the market offering lines of microcredit and advertising what they claim are innovative credit-card schemes tailored specifically to the precarious cash flow of market vendors. To get their business started, vendors need to pay a fee for setting up shop in the fair. They also need the right inventory: a selection of well-chosen stock items, be it several sets of fashionable clothing items in different sizes or a well-curated range of handcrafted jewelry, to handle the constant shift in customer tastes. Rather than promoting the strengthening of social bonds and a culture of solidarity, commercial banks investing in these market businesses tend to focus their interest mainly on vendors catering for a more upmarket, creative, and innovation-minded clientele that holds good potential for fast business growth and high returns. Taking such risks and often making substantial investments, these vendors need to comply with the innovation paradigm of global capitalist markets. They need to be always on the lookout for new and original products so they can respond adequately to the needs and demands of discerning customers and avoid delays in loan repayments. Encouraging a general climate of entrepreneurial competition at Belo Horizonte’s Hippie Fair, there is mounting pressure, not only on the part of vendors who take out a bank loan or are issued a credit card for business expansion, but also on the part of all other people engaged in the market who are equally caught up in the tension between market logic and community reality—fellow vendors, artists, manufacturers, temporary workers, service suppliers, intermediaries, or stall minders.

This shift is not occurring without support from official parties. In line with the country-wide turn toward an *Economia Popular Solidária*, numerous policy frameworks and coordinating bodies have been launched by the municipality of Belo Horizonte and the state of Minas Gerais to foster such entrepreneurial activities. The concept of an economy based on solidarity is evident, for example, in the reservation of 5 percent of vending points at the arts-and-crafts fair for philanthropic and communal initiatives, which is equal to the number of places currently allocated for the arts. In 2007 the technical advisory committee was replaced by a joint commission (Comissão Paritária) that included annually elected exhibitor representatives to consult on the running of the fair. Obtaining a license as an exhibitor is currently free of charge. However, being issued one depends on the availability of spaces and is subject to a bidding process tailored to factor in various criteria relating to social disadvantage and unfavorable socioeconomic conditions, such as illiteracy and a lack of ownership of property, land, or a vehicle.⁹ The city's "right to food" program and its accompanying promotion of farmers markets further illuminates the current embrace of (street) markets as a policy device by which socio-economic objectives are implemented in and through the urban realm. All these activities can be understood as part of a comprehensive policy catalog aimed at stimulating entrepreneurial thinking across large segments of the population to solve governance problems such as the uneven distribution of wealth and the pressures arising from economic stagnation. Be it in Brazil or elsewhere in Latin America, creative entrepreneurship as an ideological apparatus to leverage market-oriented development is increasingly being incentivized by public- and private-sector organizations alike in the struggle for global market participation.

Despite the official discourse of inclusive policies—a widely used umbrella term under which such new political programs are implemented—the operation of the fair has not been free of conflict, as evidenced notably in February 2011, when a flawed online process of

annual bidding for licenses resulted in available vending points being five times oversubscribed. This led to serious turmoil and the mobilization of the municipal guard. Tensions were eventually eased when the city reopened the bidding to existing vendors. In the summer of 2013, a new conflict arose between the vendors' association ASSEAP (Associação dos Expositores da Feira de Arte, Artesanato e Variedades da Avenida Afonso Pena) and the city authorities around the reorganization of the market's layout and fears of an unfair distribution of "good" and "bad" spots. The solution that has since been adopted, entailing groups of four tents instead of long uninterrupted rows,¹⁰ presumably affords every vendor a corner position and equal exposure to customers. While allowing for wider traffic corridors and better emergency access as well as preventing clients from getting "lost," the imposed and strictly controlled isomorphism is also instilling an ever more invasive sense of surveillance by the authorities.

Craft or Company—Performance Matters

Given the focus on arts and crafts, customized design, and creative talent, Belo Horizonte's original hippie fair could be understood as a precursor of today's hipster markets. There are numerous overlaps, in particular the importance of social media to creating a steady customer base attracted to the market's particular flair. The "Feira Hippie de BH" Facebook page boasts more than forty thousand likes and entices its visitors to post their photographic exploits, an endless promotion of leather bags, belts, and sandals, ceramic hens and pigs, wood-carved frogs and birds, artificial flowers, and all kinds of decorative baby accessories. However, local economic conditions and the wider geopolitical context have meant that the

fair has so far gone down a different route to that commonly claimed for the urban hipster economy. Rather than heralding an economy of upmarket gentrification, the expansion of the relocated hippie fair has acted as an umbrella accommodating low-end street-market activities, which are usually frowned upon by municipal administrations as potential hives of illegality.

It is through the artisan object and the myth of genuine artistic expression that, in a paradoxical way, a hippie ideology conveyed by a privileged group of discontents has met with the interest of the political classes in promoting an authentic Brazilian culture, providing popular entertainment and serving voters with economic opportunities. Intended as a critique of capitalist consumer society, the Hippie Fair, rather than establishing an autonomous zone, has colluded with the strategies of political power to align Belo Horizonte's economy with the rhythms of global markets. The shift from underground culture to officially promoted cultural heritage has been marked by ambivalence. On the one hand, it could be argued that the fair has lost its claim to the creation of a subversive autonomous zone in the face of an influx of cheap, mass-produced imports. On the other, the fair's development can also be seen as a positive achievement in the sense that it is now reaching out to a wider section of the population and reclaiming urban space for popular entertainment and recreation in the center of the city after decades of inner-city flight that rendered former sites of civic pride such as the Parque Municipal Américo Renné Giannetti, a centerpiece of Aarão Reis's urban plan, dangerous no-go areas.

Today, the fair continues to experience a period of critical transition from a site for the exhibition for arts and crafts to a recognized terrain of economic access for the masses. This discrepancy between twenty-first-century economic policies and a cultural narrative of celebrating local artistic expression, which still constitutes the fair's legitimization in official

rhetoric, produces a constant tension around the market's interaction with state governance, paradigmatic for the uneven process of global economic alignment. Brazilian organizations promoting the rise of a new entrepreneurial climate linked to artisanal production, such as SEBRAE (Brazilian Micro and Small Business Support Service), are increasingly reaching out to self-employed people, micro-entrepreneurs, and small businesses, offering training and consulting for artisan-entrepreneurs to help them better understand current market challenges. At business events, in specialized publications, and on its website, SEBRAE presents itself as a leading innovator of small business management in the field of handicrafts,¹¹ ready to help transform crafts into companies. Values traditionally associated with craft practices—autonomy, emancipation, self-realization—are sidelined in favor of an unbridled integration of artisan-style production into global commodity chains. Underlying these changes is a shift in commitment from originality and craftsmanship to market forces and managerialism, or in anthropological terms, the sociocultural conversion of artisans into entrepreneurs (Marquesan and de Figueiredo 2014). This naturalization of a managerialist ideology goes hand in hand with the reconfiguration of artisanal production. Symbolic traits such as pride, skill, and authenticity traditionally associated with handicrafts are being replaced by an increased demand for business innovation, one that is driven by rapidly increasing market access and which thrives on creative responses, such as those that take their lead from the arts-and-crafts traditions. However, rather than celebrating artisanal work practices and the mastery of precise techniques and skills, the new “craftsmanship” is guided by a managerial-functional ethos and an orientation toward profit maximization—arts-and-crafts workshops thus become business studios (Barry and Meisiek 2014).

These processes tend to trivialize the idea of handicrafts and align it to the rhythms and demands of global hypercompetition and commodification. Middle-class aspirations and the lure of symbolic and affective capital associated with the aura of time-honored craftsmanship,

free-spirited contemplation, honesty, and integrity, all contributing to an alleged simplicity of life, are projected onto the complex realities that inform Belo Horizonte's Hippie Fair. Local traders often complain about Brazilian policy programs and bodies such as SEBRAE, which they see as only interfering in local know-how in order to re-signify existing practices and reclaim the arts-and-crafts mentality around the fair as an integral part of an expanding global market. Linking the Hippie Fair to international consumption circles and global venture capital, the intervention in the local fabric by such programs has put additional strain on the configuration of this social space, with less profitable and marketable productions becoming ever more marginalized and families involved in the market struggling to keep up with the demands of modernization and regulation. In-depth studies of the formation of communities and social networks around the market suggest that beyond its generation of economic value, the fair has become a theatre for producing and trading all kinds of other values (de Pádua Carrieri, Silva Saraiva, and Pimentel 2008). Over more than four decades, the fair has served as an urban site for building, consolidating, and maintaining common values among highly diverse groups of people. A mediator of extra-economic values, it has kept alive an important aspect of civic culture, namely the right to come together, regardless of economic or social status, in the city center of Belo Horizonte—a space that has increasingly turned into an exclusive urban setting for the middle class—to dwell in the moment and celebrate life in all its richness.

What this struggle highlights are not only the tensions around traditional values connected with master craftsmanship—honesty, authenticity, integrity—and the attempt to absorb them into the circuits of rampant economic globalization, but also the necessity to understand the spatial organization linked to the fair through forms of agency, participation and control—i.e., as a significant terrain of socioeconomic negotiation rather than a predominantly functional practice. Every tent at the Hippie Fair constitutes a particular

dialogue, not just an infrastructural stratification of space. Seen in this way, the fair is a case in point that demonstrates the need to open up the question of urban economic development to changing patterns of formal-informal linkages and the different policies and socioeconomic realities that inform them.

In keeping with the increasing mediatization of politics and economic reality, Belo Horizonte's local administration employs its political dexterity to manage the visual appearance of the fair and project an attractive image to the world. While on the surface this intervention emphasizes strong formal order, manifested in its rows of tents in bright assorted colors that are appealing to the media, the market's operation relies heavily on the support of an elaborate ecosystem of informal cooperation. Despite shrinking margins,¹² the fair remains a vital terrain for vendors to navigate Brazil's notoriously volatile economy. Seen in the context of a myriad of overlapping and intersecting formal-informal linkages, the challenge for vendors lies not simply in pursuing a straightforward course to obtain a trading license, secure supplies, and keep costs down, but in imagining and furnishing the market environment in such a way as to make it fit their own possibilities and to justify their participation in it. From assembling tents and displaying what is on offer, to staking out one's territory at the fair and bonding with the crowd, staging the fair is not only a project of utility and optimization but a profoundly performative occurrence that creates a common good and determines who has access to it. It is a means of achieving a right to the city and opening up the city to a multitude of inhabitations, encounters, and exchanges.

Belying the appearance of spatial formalization and economic integration, popular informal marketplaces such as Belo Horizonte's Hippy Fair are at the forefront of marking out the parameters of a new economic paradigm of speculative formal-informal linkages. In light of their inherent instability—never to be counted on, always precarious—it is indeed the

formalized imagery of such hybrid economic environments that enables compatibility between the institutional demands of a regulated economy and the advantages gained from flexibilizing trade arrangements and externalizing risks through informalization. Championed as domains of grassroots creativity and innovation, popular markets like the Hippie Fair have given rise to a visual culture rich in patterns and forms that marry the skills of informal vendors and producers with policy demands for competitive marketing of cities. While this combination is emerging as a highly profitable formula in economic terms, and one that is being copied in many places around the world,¹³ incidents such as recurring conflicts between vendors and the municipality about the allocation of vending spots demonstrate that more advanced political instruments have yet to be developed to negotiate the implications of formal-informal linkages on the ground. The best possible role of formal-informal linkages in this process of urban economic transformation is not to simply appropriate informal economic practices as a convenient way to access new markets but to serve as a platform to include excluded and underprivileged segments of society in these negotiations on an equal footing.

¹ In the context of Brazil, see for instance the 2003 creation of the National Secretariat of Solidarity Economy (SENAES) within the Ministry of Labour and Employment; one widely hailed regional example for these initiatives oriented toward facilitating an improvement in the working standards of informal family businesses is the Vida Melhor (“Better Life”) program by the state of Bahia (Notarbartolo di Villarosa and Baddini Currello 2016).

² See, for instance, Meagher (2013).

³ See, for instance, Hammond (2007) and International Labour Organization (2014).

⁴ Numerous images of the resulting installation “Paratextos” at the Museo de Arte da Pampulha in Belo Horizonte (15 October 2016–12 March 2017) have been posted on online

platforms such as Pictaram or Imgrum, as well as on a number of art blogs. The installation housed the video inside a customized tent structure whose patchwork-like tarpaulin had been composed of all the different colors found at the Hippie Fair; see also: Maia (2016).

⁵ These include the casino turned art museum and the Church of São Francisco. Oscar Niemeyer later went on to work as chief architect for the design of Brazil's new capital Brasília, initiated under Juscelino Kubitschek's presidency (1956–1961). It should be noted, too, that, its architectural status notwithstanding, as a project of urban expansion, the Pampulha complex has also attracted severe criticism for its upmarket orientation and complete ignorance toward issues of social cohesion and integration.

⁶ This entanglement of the arts-and-crafts fair with a rich cultural history of creative production had been further underwritten by the location of its original site in Praça da Liberdade, bordered by more Niemeyer buildings, the residential Edifício Niemeyer with its iconic curved elevation and the Biblioteca Pública Estadual, as well as by the former palace of the state governor.

⁷ See also Pádua Carrieri et al. (2007).

⁸ *Sacoleiros* are Brazilians who hire fellow Brazilians (*laranjas*) to take advantage of their personal duty-free quota and to transport merchandise in small quantities across the border. In Brazil, *camelódromo* is the name used for sites where street vendors sell goods imported from Paraguay. For a more detailed analysis of these informal trade practices see, for instance, the work of Brazilian anthropologist Fernando Rabossi on the tri-border market in Ciudad del Este (e.g., Rabossi 2012).

⁹ The application of social criteria has since been successfully contested at court as having no relation to the original purpose of the arts-and-crafts market (see Recurso Extraordinário com

Agravo 724.748 Minas Gerais. Verdict by the Federal Supreme Court. Brasilia, 11 February 2013).

¹⁰ This new layout has been in place since autumn 2013.

¹¹ http://www.sebrae.com.br/sites/PortalSebrae/canais_adicionais/sebrae_english, accessed on 15 September 2018.

¹² In 2016, for instance, vendors expressed serious concerns about their ability to make ends meet in light of the country's then-staggering inflation rate of up to 10 percent.

¹³ See, for instance, the instrumental use of street markets and food festivals as a key mechanism in urban regeneration programs, epitomized most starkly in the phenomenon of hipster markets (Mörtenböck and Mooshammer 2015, 472–99).

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