Corporatism, Informality and Democracy in the Streets of Mexico City

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ABSTRACT

While the end of corporatism has been frequently announced, we argue that in Mexico it persists under contemporary neo-liberalism, albeit with new characteristics. To explore these characteristics, we use the concept of corporatism in a broader sense. That is, we assume that it not only involves relationships between trade unions, business associations and the state, but also with other civil society organisations. For our study, this includes informal worker organisations, in particular of taxi drivers and street vendors. We analyse these organisations, their relationship with the work itself (especially the occupation of public space) and their linkages with local government. We conclude that while some organisations remain independent of government control, many are imbricated in corporate relationships with the state, giving rise to an informal corporatism. Finally, we reflect on the special features this informal corporatism shows.

KEY WORDS

Corporatism; informality; work conditions; political relationships; democracy

Introduction

The issue of corporatism was widely discussed during the 1970s and 1980s, based on the famous article by Schmitter (1979). Such was its impact that it inaugurated a wholesale change in political scientists' conceptualisation of governability, as well as in the study of the relationship between politics and the economy in capitalism (Wiarda, 2004). With the arrival of neo-liberalism, it was suggested that corporatism would be exhausted when it came into conflict with the conceptions of economic self-regulation and the quest for equilibrium (Wiarda, 2009). However, the recurring crises of neo-liberalism weakened the idea of self-regulation and made it possible to open new lines of thought in relation to the persistence of a "light" corporatism that implied negotiation, agreements and regulations focused on the state or on companies (Molina and Rhodes, 2002). That is, corporatism could be combined with neo-liberalism. However, both the classic and current views have principally focused on relationships between trade unions, companies and the state, leaving other organisations out of the picture. In developing countries, the corporatist relationship has sometimes included peasant organisations and small owners or professionals. Business organisations were sometimes taken into consideration and, more recently, environmental and feminist NGOs (Crouch and Streeck, 1997).

Mexican corporatism was established in the 1930s. Corporatisation of irregular occupants of housing spaces and informal workers, especially those who worked in the streets, was not important until the great migration from the countryside to the city which took place during the 1970s. After neo-liberalism was established in the 1980s, with its recurrent crises and low economic growth, many poor citizens invaded the streets to participate in various economic activities. The state agreed to permit the occupancy of public spaces by these groupings so that they could work; in exchange, they had to adhere to some formalised regulations and maintain social peace. This state regulation does not mean that unregulated organisations could not arise and persist, but tradition and state resources continuously encouraged corporatisation.

Therefore, the concept of state corporatism has been central in the Mexican history of the twentieth century and has not disappeared with neo-liberalism; rather, it has acquired new features. By analysing two empirical cases, we argue that we are now s seeing an extended, flexible conception of corporatism: a corporatism of informality. This relationship is corporate because it implies "pacts" that have their centre in governability of the cities and the political electoral implications of that. Street workers' organisations make either formal or informal pacts – in exchange for permission to work in the public space, they must observe elementary informal rules to maintain social peace in the streets, and (sometimes) support certain political officials.

The data for this article come from two qualitative studies of neo-liberal corporatism – street vendors and taxi drivers in Mexico City. The studies involved three years of field work that consisted mainly of interviews with workers, organisation leaders, public officials and customers. In addition, the researchers carried out observations at workplaces and during collective actions planned by various organisations. Lastly, the researchers participated in some of the negotiations between workers and the authorities, and observed a number of others. Our purpose is to analyse how the organisations and conflicts relating to street-based informal workers have increased because of neo-liberalism and how, as a result, these organisations have acquired greater significance for governability in cities (Alexander, 2006).

The State, Corporatism and Governability

Capitalism began to undergo changes from the late nineteenth century with a shift from relatively free markets to the emergence of capitalist monopolies. Meanwhile, the form of the liberal state also underwent transformation, first with the creation of Bismarckian social security and, in the early twentieth century, with the development of labour legislation. This was accompanied by several other factors – the growth of the workers' movement; the spread of anarchist, socialist and communist doctrines; and, at the same time, the formation of parties by the emergent industrial working class. In this way, by the 1920s civil society could no longer be viewed as simply the realm of private business, but included class organisations, especially trade unions (De la Garza, 1994).

Gramsci postulated that corporatist pacts could be considered as forms of governability under capitalism. He believed that the state encompassed political society (government) plus civil society (civil organisations). However, until the 1970s, the term corporatist was only used to describe fascist regimes. It was Schmitter (1979) who analysed numerous non-fascist cases and included them in the notion of neo-corporatism, as a form of state legitimisation and governability run by corporations in order to represent interests and mediate between them. In this regard, he coined his famous definition of corporatism as a parallel form of representation to liberal democracy: a monopoly of

representation by a limited number of associations, whether by democratic decision or in a form imposed by the state, with obligatory incorporation of members into the organisation, and with state mediation and control of leaders. This was followed by a controversy about the existence of such form of representation and about whether corporatism was a way of taking key political decisions, a form of governability, or a way of organising the state (Lehmbrusch and Schmitter, 1982).

With the rise of neo-liberalism in the 1980s and 1990s, many scholars thought corporatist relations would collapse, since the use of the market to govern economic and political life would not be compatible with trade unions' monopoly over the workforce and their relationships with the government and business leaders. However, the change in the balance of power between capital and labour led to a growing lack of job security for workers and an increase in inequality, resulting in tensions between social classes (Castel, 2003). Given the impossibility of using only market mechanisms to govern society and the state, new forms of regulation emerged in order to safeguard hegemony and governability. These included diverse initiatives that comprised smaller-scale agreements that tended to be sectoral rather than national in nature. These were in fact palliatives to counter the asymmetries caused by the free market and the new balance of powers, and had the purpose of minimising protest (Crouch and Streeck, 2003). Indeed, some believed that corporatism was never exhausted by neo-liberalism, and that on an international level its transformation has varied along with the "varieties of capitalism" (Crouch, 2005). In this respect, the terms company corporatism, market corporatism and lean corporatism were all used.

In Mexico, corporatist relations were a product of the Mexican Revolution that was crystallised during the government of Lázaro Cárdenas and took on an institutional form with the Party of the Mexican Revolution, the predecessor to the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (Institutional Revolutionary Party, PRI). The PRI's three sectors – workers, peasants and popular – included organisations of small business owners and professionals. However, the "popular" sectors were side-lined by the powerful workers' unions and the peasant organisations. Formally, business owners – except of small businesses – did not belong to the party, but instead were involved in a wide range of agreements directed by the government. This great historical agreement included the Gramscian components of hegemony and economic growth, accumulation of capital with control over the social order, and benefits for the uppermost layer of organised workers (Bizberg, 1990).

With the change of economic model in the mid-1980s, power relations and exchanges arising from this grand agreement underwent alteration. Peasants' organisations and unions were side-lined in the development of economic and labour policies, and salaries began a real-term decline that continues to the present. Meanwhile, work contracts saw losses of benefits and an increase in flexibility; social security – in the form of pensions – was partially privatised; and labour laws were loosened. The decline in union power was also reflected in fewer political representatives in Congress, less influence on social and labour policy, and the side-lining of unions within the corporatist party, the PRI (De la Garza, 2001).

This process of neo-liberalisation and the limitations it placed on the historical corporatist agreement is reflected in an increase in both job insecurity and informal work; almost 60 per cent of the working population are engaged in informal occupations (De la Garza, 2011). This informalisation of the labour market has followed two principal courses: 1) the classic informality of self-employed persons who work with their families and a small number of wage-earners, such as street vendors or taxi drivers who work with their own cars, sometimes with their families' help or by renting cars out to non-owner drivers; 2) the new informality of those employed by formal

companies but who do not receive the benefits stipulated by law, because they are not treated as employees but as service providers hired for a fixed fee or a commission, as temporary workers, or as part of workers' cooperatives. However, associating these classic and new forms of informal work obscures the fact that the working relationships are different. The former involves the work of the self-employed and their assistants who create products or who sell merchandise or their labour. The latter involves capitalist working relationships that are not recognised as such (De la Garza, 2011).

For those who work in the street, further complications arise. They are not owners of their workplaces, and so their places of work become a disputed territory – with the authorities and with citizens ranging from neighbours, pedestrians and drivers, to other workers who provide similar services and who thus represent competition (De la Garza, 2010).

In Mexico, working informally in the street generally implies not participating in the formal labour market, but instead participating in an informal grouping of similar occupations. These informal sectors include self-employed people, their family members and those who receive a wage from the self-employed. This social construction of informal occupations that use public space entails agreements, consensus and frequently confrontation between various stakeholders. The weakness or lack of regulations governing the use of public space for the purpose of work turns the streets into a no-man's-land where conflicts are the order of the day. Thus, these workers tend to form organisations that protect them in the pursuit of their work, and which play a very significant role in what we might call the governability of the streets (Pogliaghi, 2011). While doing so, and with their particular relationships with government, they are performing what we call the corporatism of informality.

Work and Collective Organisation among Street Traders

In Mexico City, there are officially 107 000 street vendors, grouped into about 200 civil associations (Gayosso, 2012). This legal status is recognised by the authorities, and is essential to obtain permission for street trading, since informal traders are not covered by the Federal Labour Law. A significant portion of these trade organisations is also grouped into federations, of which those most notable for their political activism are the Frente Nacional de Comercio Informal (National Front of Informal Trade, FNCI), led by David Arévalo, and the Fuerza del Comercio (Power of Trade, FC), led by José Sánchez Juárez. The former is indirectly linked to the PRI (Gayosso, 2012). In general, their demands represent a response to the measures implemented by the local government, including confiscating merchandise, evicting traders or seeking to establish spatial order without including demands relating to improvement of working conditions. This dynamic, however, has allowed negotiations between the street vendors and the authorities with the aim of maintaining their work spaces.

A different case concerns an area of informal trade known as the Tianguis de Artesanías (Crafts Bazaar) in the Historic Centre of Coyoacán. In 2008, almost 500 vendors and craftspeople grouped into some twenty different organisations occupied public squares in adjacent streets to sell their products (Gayosso, 2011). After years of conflict, most of the craft traders were relocated in 2012 to the newly created Mercado Artesanal Mexicano (Mexican Handcrafts Market), located in the heart of Coyoacán. In this process, the principal trade organisation that maintained hegemony over the craft vendors and the other trade organisations until its decline in 2013 was the Asociación Nacional de Artesanos de Coyoacán (National Association of Artisans of Coyoacán, ANAC).

The organisations considered in this section are those that have maintained a relatively high level of mobilisation and achieved advances because of their activism and capacity for negotiation with the local authority, namely, FNCI and ANAC. FNCI was formally established in 2004. For this group, commercial success resulted from selling second-hand clothing smuggled from the United States to Mexico. This enabled them to consolidate the space they had occupied, and the number of traders increased to the point that, when the first Reordering Program was implemented in 1993, their leader successfully negotiated the construction of two commercial plazas.

The organisational structure of the Front is that of a civil association. It organically comprises several organisations, mainly of workers in the three different modes of informal trade (mobile, fixed, semi-fixed), though it also includes student organisations as well as ethnic, professional, community and cultural groups. However, the Front´s greatest strength is its coordination with well-established organisations of informal traders, which have thousands of members. A leader explains:

> It is not obligatory for each organisation belonging to the front to cooperate; the funds arise from the commercial places that are administered …. The National Front does not charge fees, it does not receive from the local or federal treasury or from any political party ... (David, leader).

On top of this, the Front can rely on the support of the traders' organisations in the Historic Downtown of Mexico City. In this way, FNCI comprises a basic nucleus of organisations that form a strategic core, which operates under the control of Arévalo, and another broader nucleus with a more flexible relationship that is not of subordination but of coordination and mutual support. This expanded flexible section is made up of fifty organisations operating both in the Distrito Federal (DF)[1] and in other states of the country. As a result, the coordination with these organisations takes place in specific moments and situations, when there is a concrete problem relating to their everyday sphere of operation, such as police confiscating second-hand clothing from the street markets. In fact,

> each organisation is governed autonomously; each one is oriented in a different way. There are a variety of political forms and ideologies; they can be in one or another political party and in any way, belong to the Front (David, leader).

The powers of the leadership are focused on the administration, fee collection and full representation of members before authorities, institutions, societies and bodies that defend members' rights. Throughout its existence, FNCI has relied on the capacity of its leadership to solve the problems faced by its members, above all about the defence of their places of work. This capacity is due to the fact that the principal leader has been able to weave an extensive social and political network that has enabled him to negotiate a range of benefits for those he represents – especially the use of public space in which to work – with both the DF and the federal governments, as well as with political leaders.

This achievement of protecting the working space of members from attempts by the authorities to evict them has won both the leader and the Front the support of its grassroots members. In addition, it led to an increase in the number of members, both as individuals and as

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[1] In January 2016 the DF was officially renamed Ciudad de México. In English, the area is commonly known as Mexico City.

collectives. This is linked to another key factor, which is the Front's success in winning several benefits for its members, with the implementation of organisational programmes providing access to housing, sports activities and even education. The principal strategy followed has been to negotiate with government bodies responsible for dealing with street trading. The aim has been to establish agreements and avoid confrontation.

On the other hand, the leadership exercised by the various trade organisations over the craft vendors located in the Historic Centre of Coyoacán emerged over the course of the history of the former Crafts Bazaar and continues to do so in the various spaces in which it is now housed. The control these organisations maintained over their working spaces gave rise to a specific profile for the products and the way they were presented to visitors. But in general, the organisations were responsible for enforcing the standards of control approved by the authorities, once both parties had reached agreement.

Currently, craft vendors and their organisations, having accepted the government's proposal for relocation, occupy an enclosed space known as the Handicrafts Market. This public market was created by the government in 2012 and turned vendors into tenants who had to comply with the city's Market Regulation. This implied a major disadvantage for traders, since the market could be expropriated at any time by the city government.

Most of craft vendors' organisations are constituted as civil associations. As a result, when each organisation or group deals with matters concerning their members, their formal representation is like that of a civil association, with the president acting as sole representative. Meanwhile, each organisation has developed a structure that is defined by its greater similarity to a popular social organisation than to a civil association or to a trade association or union. In this sense, they are civil associations and political trade organisations, with one or the other aspect being emphasised in accordance with their specific requirements and circumstances.

The organisational and leadership forms among craft traders can be summarised as one of two types: vertical organisations with individual leaders who dominate through charisma or tradition; and horizontal organisations with quasi-democratic leaderships based on bureaucracy and a left-wing ideology. In the former type, several organisations have been led by a single person since their creation, to whom decision-making is delegated based on a real or assumed legitimacy. In the second type, there are differences between organisations. Their legal status is that of a civil association, but their structure is different: they have a general assembly, a central political commission and sub-commissions, and all members are compelled to take part. This is the case of ANAC, in which participation has been fundamental to maintaining a horizontal decision-making structure. This is partly because, rather than promoting growth in the number of members, the initial priority was to consolidate the collective as a united, cohesive and well-informed body in order to generate alternatives as a group, preventing the emergence of authoritarian leaders.

During the period that the Crafts Bazaar existed, ANAC achieved many advances for its members, which can be summarised in the fact they were able to continue trading in the public plaza. This situation enabled the organisation to establish its legitimacy among the community of vendors, and it thus maintained its hegemony for several years. In fact, following the struggle to defend their working space, it was this organisation that successfully negotiated the craft vendors' right to remain in the Historic Centre of Coyoacán, even if no longer in the main plazas. The principle strategies developed were to maintain the internal cohesion of the group though practising selection of those who wanted to join the group. As one ANAC member explained:

> We have always had statutes, regulations, something that regulates us, and when people didn´t comply they were expelled from the association, which was just like leaving the workspace (Enrique, vendor and member of ANAC).

Likewise, negotiation and seeking agreements with authorities has been prioritised as an organising principle rather than using confrontation as a strategy to achieve its objectives. It relates to the form in which commercial activity is presented, as cultural and not only as mercantile. This has given rise to one of the organisation's key demands, that their occupation be recognised as an intangible cultural heritage, and as such deserving of respect, preservation and support.

Alliances with other organisations have been established but are subordinate to the objective of preserving ANAC's autonomy. Its principal allies, in fact, are the trade organisations working in the same area. Outside of this network, ANAC does not maintain alliances with other organisations, unions or political parties. It has also abstained from offering its support to other organisations, except for some of its members, who openly declared their personal support to the Zapatista movement. That is to say, the idea of "caring for space" was something that guided all their actions and, significantly, their refusal to form alliances with external organisations even in the context of a government offensive, like the resistance process that took place over 2008–2009. As a result, by the end of the conflict they were so economically, morally and politically exhausted that they were forced to accept the government proposal, with which most of members disagreed.

The first type of street-vendor organisation discussed above shows a corporatist relationship with the state and a vertical model of leadership. The other type shows an independent and democratic organisation. However, although FNCI has features of corporatist trade structures, it also presents differences, which position it in a favourable position in the performance of its activity as an organism representing a sector of the informal workers in the DF. It is clear that it engages in practices of clientelism towards members, and that this is a fundamental part of its strategy to gather a larger number of members. This exchange also operates externally, in relation to other bodies that have joined the Front or with which it coordinates actions in specific situations. In this process, the leader's ability to construct a network of political and social relations has been key to negotiate and solve the street vendors' problems.

Besides, the relationship between the Front, the state and political parties has been essential to achieving its objectives. This organisation expresses what elsewhere has been described as "flexible corporatism" (Gayosso, 2012) – that is, a subordination of the organisation to the state and government apparatus, but without being directly or organically linked to the party in power. Instead, this relationship is constructed in accordance with specific circumstances and with the organisation's needs. Therefore, at certain moments there may be a connection with and subordination to one party, while at others this flexible connection may be formed with another party, without committing the organisation to the demands of the party structure.

In contrast, ANAC is in a different situation. It emerged from an earlier democratic organisation that provided its members with the experience of how to construct and manage it. This was made possible thanks to the high level of member participation. It is important to highlight the way in which the members have dealt with compliance and oversight of the rules of the organisation, in particular about decision-making, accountability and election of representatives.

> In ANAC, there are no leaders who charge a fee, so that they keep doing it without doing anything else and the leader is an individual who agrees with the authorities and the party in turn. We don't have these leaders. We call them representatives, because it is any housewife or parent who comes to sell as much as he can (Sabrina, artisan and representative of ANAC).

This organisation has succeeded in maintaining its independence from any corporatist link with political parties or with the government apparatus, something that has not prevented it from negotiating and reaching agreements on several occasions, even in conditions of significant conflict. This same autonomy has led ANAC to behave in sectarian ways towards other trade and labour organisations, to the extent that it has no strategy for alliances. Nevertheless, this experience is important, since it expresses an alternative form of organisation to that which prevails among most informal street traders in the DF.

Taxi Drivers' Organisations in Mexico City

Taxi service is a public service provided by concession-holders or operators who hire vehicles from consession-holders, offering personal transport for a fare. This fare, after costs have been deducted, represents the driver's income. In 2015, according to information provided by the Secretaría de Movilidad (Mobility Secretariat), there were 125 300 licenced taxis and 282 202 operators. Even though many aspects of this job are carried out in a more or less autonomous fashion, the territorial dispersion and the long working days do not prevent the emergence of associations of taxi drivers. They join these organisations voluntarily because of the need to work in a taxi rank, to obtain a higher income, to work with greater security, or to socialise with other taxi drivers, making it a less solitary job. The common interest is a general one: essentially it comes down to the ability to provide the service and to work, as it is stated by one of the interviewees:

> Out there, you can find people fast or you cannot. And you're wasting gas. Here [in the rank administrated by the organisation] you come, you stop and do not leave until you have loaded. Then, the wear of the vehicle is less. Even if the passage is later, at the end of the day you did the same if you were here or on the street (Julio, taxi driver).

Under this premise, taxi drivers form groupings – some with official recognition, others not – and define the objectives, functions and actions of the organisations. Their role can be summarised as mediating between the authorities and taxi drivers. They adopt diverse legal status, functions, internal dynamics and ideologies. Nevertheless, even when they have different characteristics, they share the fact of bringing together and representing workers who carry out their activity in a relatively independent manner. However, since there is no employer, they represent the interests of their members to the government, especially negotiating with local authorities with regard to fares, use of space, and conditions of offering the service and work.

Nevertheless, only 30 per cent of taxi drivers belong to the almost 400 associations that operate in the city. Why is this so, when they share the same working experiences and have the same problems? Collectivising implies something more than sharing an occupation or an identity as taxi drivers. It also implies willingness and decisiveness.

The choice to join an association may be based on a cost-benefit analysis. As one leader states,

> People participate for the benefit that can be given, 95 per cent, and 5 per cent for ideals (Miguel, leader).

However, the decision cannot be said to be rational insofar as it is not based on verifiable and complete information, but rather on drivers' direct experiences of having seen what is involved in joining an organisation, or what a friend, acquaintance or family member has told them. This may also persuade them to remain independent and not join up. Besides, many taxi drivers distrust leaderships and leaders. One of them explains why he had chosen not to join:

> To feed the leader and us to be fucked? ... If I'm robbed for working in the street, better to be robbed by a thief and not by a leader (Juan Carlos, taxi driver).

A driver may have belonged to an organisation in the past and felt cheated, or that their membership did not meet their expectations upon joining. Besides, regulation and organisation of the service provision in the city favours independent work, without the need to join an association. On top of this, given that labour relations are not treated as formal working relations, the labour regulations in force represent an obstacle to taxi drivers establishing a traditional form of organisation that represents their interests. Finally, there is a generalised discrediting and lack of trust towards unions and by extension other organisations that represent the interests of workers. In Mexico, most of these organisations have suffered a loss of legitimacy. A taxi driver said:

> It is throwing away your money … they only use you ... All organisations in Mexico, I dare say that all are sold, only seek their interests. It was not necessary, I never felt the need to belong to any association (Germán, taxi driver).

Practices followed by some leaders, such as personal enrichment, undemocratic decisions and placing personal interest ahead of collective interests have reinforced a generally poor perception of the organisations. Besides, the feeling that they are continually disadvantaged and that even by joining an association they will not alter their situation leads many to prefer to "get by" working individually, rather than investing time and money in a collective that frequently leads to rejection or uncertainty.

All this gives rise to the impression that, in the taxi sector, there has emerged a form of domination known as patrimonialism (Rodríguez, 1997; Loaeza, 2008). Thus, if the leader is seen as the owner of the association, there is little room for demanding rights or for participation. In such cases, responding to demands is treated as a favour, in exchange for loyalty and the legitimisation of power relations. The aim is not to generalise or claim that this occurs regularly, but rather to point out these perceptions at the level of taxi drivers' subjectivity when judging whether to join an organisation that might represent them.

An additional problem is the large number of organisations of taxi drivers and the little or no coordination between them. However, over the years many groupings at a higher level have formed, evolved and disappeared. These second-level groupings emerge when the need arises to join forces to make a joint demand. However, whether or not the specific objective is achieved, they tend to break up fairly rapidly. The non-official status of many of these second-level organisations, together

with the low level of participation of some leaders and taxi drivers, as well as their internal struggles, mean that few of these groupings remain active in the long term. One leader said:

> Do you know how many of these [groups of organisations] I have seen go by? Don't worry, in a while this is gone and then the other comes (Alberto, leader).

Moreover, the linkage of one grouping with the ruling political party may be a problem for a broad organisation. At one extreme, according to some interviewees, there is a clientelism based on trading favours in exchange for organisations not engaging in actions against the government, or supporting the implementation of a given programme. This grants them certain privileges, such as concessions, the creation of taxi ranks, or changes in the mode of service provision enabling taxis to charge higher fares. At the other extreme, organisations may experience harassment or punishment when they do not follow the government line, or when they make demands or mobilise, or refuse – as one leader remarked – to make "extra-official payments" to conclude an administrative procedure. The organisations on this side tend to make strong accusations against the authorities. For example, in one mobilisation, a leader told us:

> That we are in the best disposition ... And what? They are the same or worse, more corrupt than the others [the PRI rulers] (Marcelo, leader).

In this way, the first type of relationship resembles classic corporatist relationships established between the state and unions in Mexico that we have described above, even though relationships and exchanges are not the same, given that these organisations are not unions and the relationship is not with the federal but rather the local government. Meanwhile, organisations that refuse to abide by this relationship may be labelled as opponents by the government; even if they are not wholly punished, they are hindered in their activities or do not receive the same benefits as others. This is not a new situation, given that traditionally union opposition frequently encountered both legal and illegal obstacles to progress (De la Garza, Melgoza and Campillo, 1999).

In effect, corporatist relations imply forms of subjectivity among organised social actors, based on the codes of dependence and subordination to the state and/or a political party. This, however, is frequently disapproved of by taxi drivers and demotivates them from collectivising. While traditional state corporatism was based on a relationship between the federal government, the PRI and the top tiers of the unions, in Mexico City the current relationship is between the local government and several organisations that do not necessarily belong to the party of government, but may give support in a pragmatic way. A leader explains it:

> I better become a governist.[2] I work with the government, nothing more. ... I don't get involved with any party. If I support, I support some friends, not a special party. ... I manage it at the organisational level. If there is any friend there, we support him (Pedro, leader).

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[2] A governist is a person who does not necessarily belong to a political party ideologically or formally, but who supports the ruling government for his or her own reasons. When a new government assumes power, even if it belongs to a different political party, the same person might support the new government.

In addition, there is no guarantee on the monopoly of representation: there is no single, legally-established organisation representing all taxi drivers, and nor do the drivers have an obligation or even a need to join one. However, they are ensured a "micro-monopoly" over the group of drivers who work or wish to work in a given taxi rank. There may be disputes among groupings for the space, but in the end only one will legally be entitled to it.

All these relationships are not based on a national project that seeks governability, but on achieving specific benefits for taxi drivers and their organisations in exchange for keeping a "social and territorial peace". This is achieved by limitation of open collective action and, in some cases, support for particular public policies or for a candidate to election. Authorities would not care as much about a strike, as for the traffic chaos caused by a demonstration. And taxi drivers and their organisations know this; a demonstration is the last resort, when corporatist negotiation has failed:

> Before arriving at this press conference, we culminated the way of dialogue, the way of negotiation with the authorities .... At the dialogue tables, it must be said, rudely the Secretary has left us planted on three occasions, which is also an offensive attitude towards the sector. We have started with the willingness of dialogue and negotiation. However, we do feel that we are banked towards mobilisation (Miguel, leader).

Final Reflections: Internal Organisation of Informal Street Workers
In Mexico, there are many organisations of informal workers, especially of those who work in the street. Most of them take the form of civil associations, which are not unions but rather are regulated by the civil code. As such, they are unable to engage legally in labour disputes. Instead of focusing on traditional labour issues, the experience of working in the public space becomes central to their organisation. The centrality of public space reflects certain realities for the workers:

- Each organisation has occupied a space with or without prior negotiation with the authorities. They do not own this space, and many actors may question their position, beginning with the authorities themselves.
- The tradition of occupying public space with the support of these organisations forms a type of "informal right" in the subjective view of the workers.
- The fragile possession of these public spaces is not backed up by any legal framework, but depends on customs and administrative bargaining with different levels of government.
- Potential disputes and ambiguities always exist in the relationships between multiple urban actors (Gayosso, 2012).

The complexity of these activities, which involve several types of workers in a single area together with the multiple actors who may be involved in their work, means that the use of public space becomes the principal demand and a motive of conflict. Other kinds of demand, such as social security, training or loans, have sometimes been expressed but do not yet form causes for mobilisation (De la Garza et al, 2008).

Weakness of regulation of such work and government intervention lead to the need for organisations. However, it also leads to the dependence of workers on their leaders, on their capacity to influence the authorities and on their personal knowledge of the latter, which form the basis for

caudillismo,[3] patrimonialism and clientelism – features that arises in these new corporatist relationships.

A few years ago, the Mexico City government established the Subdirección del Trabajo no Asalariado (Sub-Department for the Unwaged Worker) Although this only included some types of informal workers – for example, street traders were included while taxi drivers were not – it is notable as the first initiative in Mexico to formally include these workers. However, in the recent reform to the Federal Labour Law made in 2012, no clause covered this kind of worker, unlike the equivalent legislation in Chile, Argentina, Brazil and Peru. Mexican labour law continues to treat the labour relationship as between an employer and a wage-earner, rather than in a broader sense that would enable the inclusion of clients and other actors in urban spaces. As a result, informal street workers are not entitled to social security, the right to negotiate with authorities or to act collectively to defend their working space.

For this reason, informal workers' organisations, in the best case, operate under the civil code's regulations for a civil association. These statutes cover the form of leadership elections, the period of holding elected posts, and the way members' assemblies are held. In most cases, these are organisations which the leaders and their families treat as their property, with a high level of arbitrariness and authoritarianism. The cases analysed are not extreme examples of a lack of democracy. In both cases of street vendors' associations there are assemblies, although in one these are highly controlled by the leaders and are more informative in nature, while in the other there is discussion and the possibility of replacing leaders. For taxi drivers, there is a presence of organisations in their workplaces, and sometimes assemblies, which may be informative or involve debate and elections, and may be participatory or highly controlled. The groupings of street vendors are heterogeneous in nature. Some have a vertical hierarchy, with violence expressed towards dissenting voices, no elections or information for members; members pay their dues to the organisation and implicitly enjoy some protection from attempts at eviction by the authorities. Other organisations may be characterised as occupying a middle ground. Their leaders do maintain contact with members, and inform them of different issues, but do not submit their decisions to votes. There are elections in these organisations, but they are very controlled, usually with a single name on the voting slip. Lastly, the fewest number of organisations are those that are properly democratic, where leaders rotate and compete, respect the rules and foster a democratic culture.

Lack of democracy in most of these organisations does not always mean that their leaders hold no legitimacy. Street workers come from political cultures forged in the manner of the old-style PRI party. There is acceptance of a vertical hierarchy, where leaders make the decisions and grant favours on a whim, where the exchanges are never governed by rules but by the leader's will and the submission of the worker. That is, their legitimacy is won by administrative favours handed to leaders personally, and by their effectiveness in maintaining the space in which to work. Although there is a type of implicit corporatist agreement resulting from the organisation's commitment to maintain public order, they are very fragile since they depend on the personalities of the leaders and the incumbent government officials, as well as political circumstances in the broader sense. Legitimacy of leaders is also determined by their capacity for dealing with public officials, either

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[3] There is no precise definition of *caudillo*. It means "leader" but a particular type of leader. This is a person who concentrates a great deal of power within himself, a strongman. His followers are guided by him and seldom disobey him.

because they establish relationships of trust or because they can sow fear by threatening to cause trouble. These capacities have little to do with their expertise in terms of bureaucratic rules relating to these jobs, since these are non-existent or very weak. The formation of oligarchies has more to do with the capacity of networking with authorities, of mobilising members at moments of serious conflict and of establishing political alliances with parties or government authorities.

There is a high possibility that disagreements with public officials about the use of public space may lead to collective actions and sometimes to social movements. This is because there is no full guarantee that street workers can retain their places of work, in part because other actors also wish to use this space for other purposes. When collective actions take place, these workers identify their enemy, which is usually the government (Giménez, 2008). They are also clear about "who they are" as taxi drivers or street vendors. It is rare, however, for street workers to identify themselves with other occupations. There may also be a consciousness of being precarious workers (Standing, 2011), with forms of work and life that are separate from the rest of society – "the rich" among whom they include the middle class, and workers who benefit from social security (De la Garza, Gayosso & Moreno, 2011).

When such mobilisations arise, they are sometimes called by leaders, but also occur spontaneously because workers feel harassed by the authorities. Sometimes workers are evicted from the spaces they control and sometimes they are relocated. On other occasions, a cycle of eviction and reoccupation begins and can last a long time. These conflicts include aspects relating to the workers' interest in retaining the space, but also other aspects that are emotional or governed by custom. These may include a sense of injustice, arbitrariness or anger at the excessive use of force. Customs also relate to places of work that have sometimes been occupied for generations. Broader movements have arisen, but only when government actions have affected these workers as a whole. It is rare that collective actions involve more than one type of occupation. There has been no involvement with unions, which is not the result of a respect for regulations, but rather the influence of leaders in Mexico over such groups.

In any case, if they want to work in the streets, negotiation is needed and it takes place in a corporatist way. Contents of the agreements are minimal and usually come down to permission to use public space to work. They are also weak, since they concern irregular businesses and there is no legislation to fall back on. The agreements are simple pacts with mid- or low-level authorities that can be revoked with no legal implications. They do not give rise to institutions or bodies for resolving disputes in a permanent manner, nor is there procedural law that can be appealed to. However, these frequently broken agreements contribute to containing social conflict arising from the large precarious sectors by including many informal workers.

We have seen in this article that, while the political importance of trade unionism and peasant organisations declines, the activity of those who work in the streets increases. These workers have formed multiple organisations that are not considered by the law as unions, but as civil organisations that have frequently managed to "negotiate" the use of public space as a work space, usually in a corporatist way. However, this relationship of "mutual benefit", with political implications for the governance of cities, has not led to new legislation but rather to fragile administrative agreements that can be broken by either party. The breaking of one pact commonly leads to the formation of others. These are the characteristics of what we call a corporatism of informality.

Although corporatist relationships predominate among those who use the public space to work in Mexico City, we have also analysed independent and democratic organisations. Therefore, using the street as a work space does not necessarily mean an inevitable corporate destiny.

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