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DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Concrete, Clay and Mirrorglass: Politics and the Planning of Kabul

Pietro Calogero

2009

Abstract

Concrete, Clay and Mirrorglass: politics and the planning of Kabul explores how the capital of Afghanistan has been planned, focusing a six-year period from late 2001 to late 2007. Three modes of planning are analyzed. The Concrete is the expected mode of formal legal planning conducted by Afghan public agencies. This mode is characterized by interagency conflict between Soviet-educated technocratic planners in the city government, and community/context-sensitive planners at the national Ministry. By 2007 the local technocrats prevail. The Clay is informal modes of planning, including collusion between poor and elite residents that reveals substantial informalization of the urban regime itself. Local attempts to tap transnational circuits of capital through informal development yield an innovative new building type, the aid-palace. The Mirrorglass is the mode of transnationals planning Kabul, including militaries, diplomatic communities, the aid industry and foreign media. Analysis of the Mirrorglass mode of planning reveals how most foreign efforts to help develop Kabul have failed, through economies of fear and the discontinuities of a contract-defined aid regime. Ethical implications of knowledge-production, working through failure, and transnational planning commitments are explored.

The analysis is framed as an extended case study of how urbanization is being planned, in a city which is geopolitically extraordinary in a moment of global empire. However Kabul is also representative of most of the urbanization occurring planet-wide at this time, as a mid-sized city growing rapidly under conditions of political and economic duress.

Street Vending in New York City: The Spatial Politics of Regulation

Ryan Devlin

2009

Abstract

Often, in the context of the Global North, law is theorized as a relatively stable and solid edifice, structuring urban space in a definitive and consistent manner. Most urban scholars, whether critical of increasing regulation and privatization of public space or viewing it as necessary for public comfort and safety, carry the assumption that once laws are put in place, they work more or less as they should. This dissertation uses the case of street vending in New York to challenge this view and to complicate our understanding of the relationship between law and space in the contemporary city.

The regulatory framework governing street vending is convoluted, contradictory, and difficult to enforce. It produces and encourages high levels of informal practice by both vendors and those who seek to regulate the practice. I argue that this situation is not simply an anomaly of bureaucratic or legal inefficiency, but rather can be understood as a new regime of managing and regulating public space through informality. In this dissertation I demonstrate the ways in which the condition of informality itself serves as a flexible, decentralized and cost-effective means of spatial governance. It absolves the state of costly and politically uncertain reform initiatives, while allows powerful property interests, organized into Business Improvement Districts, to deal with vending regulation in an informal, semi-privatized, and decentralized fashion. While serving as a relatively effective means of spatial management, the decentralized and contingent nature of spatial governance also opens up new spaces for contestation and political claims by street vendors themselves.

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