

Latino Urbanism

Pring..pringgg...little bells and the yodeling of tamaleeeees! is heard on Ceaser Chavez Blvd. Street vendors fill the air with the smell of bacon wrapped hot dogs,their whistles and *antojitos* to suit your taste buds. On Sundays once a month all of Broadway Blvd. turns in to a tiangis (yard sale) where apartment dwellers come to share and sell their wares on a busy transit road as a garage sale style street event for 12 blocks.

Informal economies such as street vendors in East Los Angeles are a part of the landscape. They typically work on sidewalks with heavy pedestrian traffic near parks, plazas, schools, intersections, and parking lots. The items they sell include, but are not limited to, pre-packaged snacks, cooked food, fruits and vegetables, toys, clothing, household items, and counterfeit merchandise.

Unfortunately, street vending has come under attack by city council and local authorities. Law enforcement has written thousands of tickets costing vendors several days of earnings. Officers often confiscate the property and goods of the vendors leaving them destitute.

We know that the city has been designed mainly for the car and this auto centricity has created serious health issues including air pollution and discouraging people from walking.

One [urban planner](#) has looked at how this informal economy actually helps to promote the walk ability and pedestrian friendly streets in Los Angeles. [James Rojas](#) makes the case that any restrictions will actually be creating a worse situation in an already car congested city.

“Allowing street vendors the opportunity to profit from the use of public rights-of-way could be a new way to make L.A.’s increasingly unsustainable, auto-oriented infrastructure more compatible for pedestrian uses.”

This is a non traditional way of creating space and more ,place making, if you will which Rojas has coined, “Latino Urbanism,” the creative culture and adaptation that exists as an informal [urban design](#) element. Latinos are not remaking these places in the sense of construction; they are instead discovering latent “place-ness” in [landscapes](#) that already exist.

Latinos are going to continue to take advantage of these spaces because we come from a culture of outdoor plazas and markets.

[Jose Gamez](#), a professor of architecture at UNC-Charlotte, agrees. "The stereotypical white picket fence in the suburban landscape is a very different kind of fence than you'll see in East Los Angeles," he says. "Not in terms of materiality but in terms of social use."

Public policies are changing and desperate the street vendors have turned to their councilmember, Councilmember Huizar in 2007, who understood that in order to preserve the culture of the Boyle Heights community he needed to preserve the street vendor community.

Collecting over 1000 signatures with the help of [ELACC \(East Los Angeles Community Corporation\)](#) they created a Street Vendor Committee who helps preserve this informal economy to preserve work which is the only means for some of these members.

This creative solution is working in other areas of Los Angeles including downtown and the fashion district. Sellers now can have permits and sell in designated areas and set up in without being harassed for violation. Again this is all part of the new adjustment that planning is having to observe in order to make policies that meet the needs of citizens in an ever changing city.