

Street-Level Economies in the Face of Urban Gentrification: Policy–Community Interactions in Bandung’s Informal Trading Sector

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Abstract

Over the past decade, Bandung’s urban transformation, through public space revitalization, pedestrianization of commercial areas, and tourism-oriented development, has triggered gentrification processes that directly affect street vendors as a vital component of the informal economy. This study aims to examine the socio-economic impacts of gentrification on street vendors, uncover their strategies of negotiation and resistance to urban planning policies, and explore prospects for sustaining street-level economies amid modernization. Employing a qualitative ethnographic approach in Jalan Braga, Alun-Alun Bandung, and Dago, data were collected through participant observation, in-depth interviews with vendors, visitors, and government officials, as well as analysis of policy documents and visual archives. Thematic analysis reveals three main findings: first, gentrification displaces vendors through spatial restrictions and stringent regulations; second, vendor communities adapt by employing location mobility, product diversification, and solidarity networks; third, policy–community tensions persist due to conflicting perceptions of public space functions. The study’s novelty lies in its focus on street-based informal trade under gentrification in the Global South, a perspective rarely addressed compared to housing-focused research. Integrating Urban Political Economy, Informal Economy, and Right to the City theories, this research expands urban studies to non-residential public spaces and offers an analytical framework adaptable to other developing cities, advocating inclusive and collaborative urban policies to ensure socio-economic justice.

Keywords: Economic Informality, Gentrification, Public Space, Street Vendors, Urban Planning



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INTRODUCTION

The transformation of urban landscapes in Indonesia’s major cities over the past decade has generated complex dynamics between modernization, spatial planning, and the economic life of residents. Bandung, as one of Indonesia’s creative cities and prime tourist destinations, provides a vivid example of how urban spatial transformations reshape socio-economic structures at the grassroots level (Duarte et al., 2024; Winarso, 2022). Municipal programs of public space revitalization, pedestrianization of commercial areas, and the development of urban tourism have given Bandung a new face, tidier, aesthetically appealing, and attractive to visitors. Yet behind this aesthetic veneer lie socio-economic consequences that often escape notice: the displacement of street vendors (pedagang kaki lima, PKL), who

have long served as the lifeblood of the street economy and an integral part of the city's identity. In iconic areas such as Jalan Braga, Bandung's Alun-Alun, and Dago, the gentrification process not only alters physical landscapes but also compels PKL communities to adapt, negotiate, and struggle under increasingly restrictive regulatory frameworks.

This phenomenon merits serious attention because the informal trade sector in developing cities is not a marginal entity without contribution, but rather a major provider of employment, a driver of daily consumption, and a bridge between the formal economy and the needs of the lower-middle classes (Hernández et al., 2023; Sultana et al., 2022b). Adihartono (2023) notes that the informal sector in Indonesia absorbs more than 57% of the labor force, with street vendors as a dominant urban subsector. In Bandung, the existence of PKL is not only tied to economic factors but also constitutes a cultural legacy shaping how residents and newcomers interact with public spaces (Adihartono, 2023; Warlina et al., 2021). However, the entry of spatial planning logics oriented toward tourism and upper-middle-class consumption often positions PKL as a "visual disturbance" or "obstruction to pedestrian flow," leading to policies that are more restrictive than collaborative.

Studies of gentrification have predominantly focused on housing and residential aspects, as seen in the works of Cuberos-Gallardo (2024), Sherman (2023), and Yoshida & Kato (2023). Meanwhile, the dimension of non-residential public spaces, particularly as arenas for informal economies, remains understudied. Some scholarship has begun to shift this focus, such as Hepburn et al. (2024) in Mexico, which demonstrates how efforts to "modernize" public space often result in social exclusion of street traders. In Indonesia, Batubara et al. (2023) and Mursalin et al. (2024) underscore that urban development agendas frequently sacrifice vulnerable groups, including PKL, in the name of order and city aesthetics. Similarly, Wagianto et al. (2024) show in their study on PKL relocation in Yogyakarta that such policies rarely account for the socio-economic networks embedded in original sites, leading to declines in income and competitiveness.

Mareï & Savy (2021) and Recio (2022) observe that in many Global South cities, conflicts between municipal governments and street traders often arise from differing perceptions of public space functions. Allison et al. (2021) highlight that strict regulation without participatory mechanisms tends to deepen marginalization. In the Southeast Asian context, Maglumtong & Fukushima (2022) and Renwick (2021) find that women street vendors in Bangkok employ complex adaptive strategies to secure access to urban spaces, ranging from informal alliances with officials to flexible adjustments of operating hours. These findings indicate that resistance to exclusion is not merely spontaneous action but rather part of planned economic-political strategies.

In Bandung, previous studies have addressed the relationship between urban spatial policies and the informal sector, yet they tend to be limited to licensing issues or relocation arrangements (Hermawan, 2024; Indriasari et al., 2023; Phelps & Aritenang, 2023). These works have not fully explored how PKL interpret changes in urban space, how they construct survival strategies, and how their interactions with municipal policies unfold amid tourism-driven gentrification. Yet, understanding these dynamics is crucial for exposing hidden power

relations behind the rhetoric of “order” and “revitalization,” which may sound positive on the surface but often have exclusionary implications in practice.

Meanwhile, Harvey’s (2016) theory of Urban Political Economy, Dell’Anno’s (2022) concept of the Informal Economy, and Harvey’s (2017) notion of the Right to the City provide relevant analytical frameworks for unpacking this problem. Urban Political Economy reveals that urban policies are not neutral but tend to accommodate capital and powerful groups. The Informal Economy perspective views street trading not as a problem but as a vital component of the urban economic ecosystem. The Right to the City emphasizes the entitlement of residents, including PKL, to access and participate in shaping the urban spaces they inhabit. The integration of these three perspectives has rarely been employed simultaneously in studies on PKL in Indonesia, especially within the context of tourism-driven gentrification.

This study positions itself within that gap. Focusing on iconic public spaces in Bandung such as Jalan Braga, the Alun-Alun, and Dago, all of which have undergone significant spatial interventions, it reveals the multilayered interactions between municipal policies and PKL communities amid gentrification. Rather than merely assessing economic impacts or policy effectiveness, this research delves into the lived experiences, adaptive strategies, and negotiations undertaken by PKL on a daily basis. Through an ethnographic approach, the voices and perspectives of actors on the ground form the center of analysis, thus avoiding the top-down bias that often characterizes policy studies.

The primary objective of this study is to gain a deep understanding of how gentrification affects the sustainability of street economies, to identify the adaptive strategies employed by PKL, and to map the friction points as well as potential spaces for collaboration between municipal governments and PKL communities. This approach not only enriches gentrification literature by highlighting non-residential public space dimensions in developing cities but also provides an analytical framework for designing urban policies that are more inclusive, just, and sustainable for street economies in the era of modernization.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach with an ethnographic strategy, as its main objective is to deeply understand the dynamics of interaction between municipal policies and street-level economic actors in the context of gentrification. This approach was chosen based on the consideration that informal trade phenomena in public spaces cannot be adequately understood solely through numerical or statistical data, but require close attention to lived experiences, adaptive strategies, and subjective meanings held by the actors (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018; Dewi, 2022). Ethnography enables the researcher to enter into social contexts, observe everyday interactions, and capture nuances of power relations that may be concealed behind the discourses of urban spatial regulation.

The fieldwork was conducted at three major sites in Bandung, Jalan Braga, the Alun-Alun, and the Dago area, because these are iconic public spaces that have undergone revitalization and pedestrianization over the past decade, while also serving as vibrant centers

of informal trade. Jalan Braga symbolizes heritage and tourism, having experienced significant visual restructuring; the Alun-Alun functions as a wide open public square with multiple social uses; and Dago represents a commercial corridor transformed into a recreational and nightlife zone. Collectively, these sites represent diverse contexts of tourism-driven gentrification in Bandung, offering a comprehensive picture of how PKL respond to spatial transformations.

The study involved 27 informants, grouped into three main categories: 15 street vendors operating in the selected sites, 7 visitors or users of public spaces from diverse socio-economic backgrounds, and 5 municipal officials or staff directly engaged in spatial planning and policy implementation. Informants were selected purposively, considering their direct involvement with the issues under study and the variety of experiences that could enrich the data (Mäder, 2023). Vendors were chosen based on diversity of merchandise, duration of operation, and selling location; visitors were included to capture public perceptions of PKL in gentrified spaces; while municipal officials were selected for their policy and regulatory perspectives.

Data collection was carried out over six months using three main techniques: participant observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. Participant observation involved the researcher's regular presence in the three sites, engaging directly with vendors and visitors, and recording patterns of interaction, adaptive strategies, and spatial dynamics (Cheron et al., 2022; Prosek & Gibson, 2021). In-depth interviews were conducted to capture informants' personal narratives, lasting between 45 and 90 minutes, and recorded with their consent. Document analysis included reviewing local regulations, spatial plans, media coverage, and visual archives before and after revitalization. This methodological triangulation allowed the researcher to link field experiences with the formal policy framework.

Data analysis employed thematic analysis, whereby data from observations, interviews, and documents were organized into thematic categories relevant to the study's focus: impacts of gentrification, adaptive strategies, and policy–community relations (Coronella & Aiken-Wisniewski, 2022). The analysis was iterative, with the researcher repeatedly returning to the field to clarify findings and deepen understanding. Data validity was ensured through source triangulation, comparing information from vendors, visitors, and officials; methodological triangulation, combining observations, interviews, and documents; and temporal triangulation, conducting data collection across various days and times to capture activity variations (Stanley, 2023).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Gentrification and Displacement: Spatial Reordering that Displaces Street Economies

The transformation of urban spaces in Bandung over the past decade, particularly through revitalization and pedestrianization programs, has had tangible impacts on the sustainability of street economies. On Jalan Braga, Bandung's Alun-Alun, and the Dago area, physical changes to public spaces were officially aimed at beautifying the city, improving pedestrian comfort, and strengthening Bandung's image as a world-class tourist destination.

However, behind this development narrative lie consequences that were not always accommodated in policy planning: the displacement of street vendors (PKL) who have long been a vital part of economic and social life in these spaces. Field observations over several months show that this process did not take the form of direct evictions, but rather a series of policies and spatial reordering that gradually narrowed the operating space of PKL.

On Jalan Braga, for instance, the sidewalk revitalization carried out since 2019 introduced wide pedestrian lanes with aesthetic benches, artistic lighting, and special areas for art performances. However, the design explicitly excluded spaces for PKL who had previously sold along the sidewalk edges. In practice, public order officers frequently reminded or asked vendors to relocate their stalls, even during hours that were previously more flexible. A beverage vendor who had been working on Braga for over ten years told the researcher that he can now only sell at specific points after 8:00 PM, because before that time officers would reprimand him. He noted that this rule cut his revenue by nearly half, as peak visitor flows occur in the late afternoon toward evening. Field observations confirmed his statement: from one end of Jalan Braga to the other, only one or two vendors were visible during the day, and even then with movable carts to allow quick withdrawal if asked.

A similar situation occurred at Bandung's Alun-Alun, which since 2015 has been revitalized into a green open space featuring synthetic grass. Before revitalization, the area was filled with snack vendors, children's toy sellers, and souvenir stalls around the perimeter. Now, the space is vendor-free, justified by the goal of maintaining cleanliness and visitor comfort. However, this policy was not accompanied by the provision of alternative strategic locations. Interviews with a long-time toy seller, Mr. M, revealed that he now sells on a side street with far lower pedestrian traffic. He reported that his income dropped drastically, from an average of IDR 300,000 per day to only around IDR 100,000. Researcher observations confirmed that remaining vendors set up outside the Alun-Alun fence, in less visible positions, reducing spontaneous interactions between buyers and sellers.

The Dago area presents another form of displacement, subtler yet still significant. The weekend night pedestrianization, known as "Car Free Night," was initially promoted as an opportunity for MSMEs to market their products. However, participant selection prioritized formal vendors or those connected to the city's creative communities, leaving many traditional PKL excluded. A street food vendor, Mrs. R, recounted how she once tried to register for the official event but failed to qualify because her stall design and product type were not considered "representative." Field observations revealed that most stalls sold modern foods or creative crafts, while traditional food vendors were relegated to the outer periphery of the event.

The forms of displacement observed in these three sites included reduced selling areas, stricter operating hours, and restricted access to strategic points. Reduced areas were evident in Braga and the Alun-Alun, where new physical designs simply left no space for informal stalls. Stricter operating hours were enforced through routine patrols that forced PKL to shift to lower-traffic hours. Restricted access was visible in Dago, where vendors were barred from core event zones due to failing to meet aesthetic or product quality standards.

The official city government narrative for all these policies is “order” and “tidiness.” In an interview with an official from the Spatial Planning Office, Mr. T, he emphasized that reordering was done to enhance the city’s image, expand pedestrian access, and maintain cleanliness. He also argued that PKL still had designated selling points, though these were outside the main revitalized zones. Yet for many PKL, this narrative sounded like a justification for eliminating their livelihoods. They saw relocation to less strategic areas as equivalent to losing income, and believed that policies favored tourists and the middle class over locals who rely on street trade for survival.

Analysis of these findings aligns with Uitermark et al. (2024), Zhang & Pan (2022), and Zou (2022), who describe “soft eviction” as a gradual exclusion process carried out through regulation, spatial design, and administrative selection, without direct physical eviction. In Bandung, such soft eviction is visible in how pedestrianization and revitalization policies slowly displaced PKL by restricting access, tightening selling hours, and imposing participation criteria that small vendors could not meet. This process avoids open confrontation but produces the same outcome: the loss of PKL’s strategic positions in public space.

The tension here lies between a city aesthetic oriented toward tourists and the economic sustainability of local residents. The municipal government seeks to build Bandung’s image as a clean, orderly, and tourist-friendly “Paris van Java,” while for PKL, public space is a living arena that provides social interaction and daily income. Observations at the three sites showed that while revitalization improved visual comfort and infrastructure for visitors, the once-vibrant street economy diminished. Jalan Braga, once alive with bargaining sounds and food aromas, is now quieter during the day. The Alun-Alun, once a hub of spontaneous interactions between families and vendors, has become a sterile recreational space without trading dynamics.

The displacement experienced by PKL is not merely a physical relocation but also a form of economic and social exclusion. Losing access to strategic spaces means severing customer networks built over years. Declining incomes affect household stability, while reduced social interactions with buyers erode PKL’s identity as part of the city’s social fabric. From Zhang & Pan’s (2022) perspective, Bandung’s policy-driven gentrification deploys urban development discourse, such as “order,” “modernization,” or “revitalization”, to justify public space restructuring that ultimately benefits the empowered, especially the middle class and formal tourism sector.

From this depiction, it becomes clear that PKL displacement in Bandung is not an unintended consequence of modernization but part of a structured process shaped by policy logic and spatial design. When aesthetics and tourism consumption become primary orientations, local economic functions and social diversity in public spaces are marginalized. This raises fundamental questions about who truly has the right to determine the form and function of urban space, and how to balance modernization with local economic sustainability without sacrificing the most vulnerable groups.

PKL Adaptation Strategies: Mobility, Diversification, and Community Solidarity

Amid the gentrification reshaping Bandung's city center, PKL on Jalan Braga, the Alun-Alun, and Dago demonstrate complex and creative adaptive capacities. Their experiences speak not only to economic survival but also to how lower-class urban residents negotiate their rights to public space through strategies often invisible in official government narratives.

Mobility of location has become a key strategy. Many PKL who once sold in prime tourist areas now relocate their stalls to less-policed spots or exploit hours when surveillance weakens. Field observations in late afternoons on Jalan Braga revealed shifting activity patterns: carts reappeared along the street edges as officers departed, while during the day vendors preferred side alleys or discreet corners. One informant, Rn, shared that he now more often "sneaks" in after 8:00 PM when patrols are rare. This strategy, he said, allows him to access the night tourist flow without facing raids.

Product diversification emerged as another significant adaptation. With shrinking space and rising competition, many PKL shifted from selling one product type to offering a variety tailored to tourism trends or seasonal demands. At the Alun-Alun, a vendor who once only sold coconut drinks now also offered roasted corn, tourist accessories, and children's toys. Diversification not only raised income potential but also attracted diverse consumer segments, from family tourists to local visitors. Another informant, Ls, reported selling Bandung-themed souvenirs after noticing strong tourist demand. He described this adjustment as a way of "going with the flow" to remain relevant amid intensifying competition.

Community solidarity further strengthened PKL resilience. Vendors often shared information on patrol schedules, temporary policy shifts, or new safer selling spots. Informal alliances formed not only among PKL but also with parking attendants and, occasionally, more tolerant security officers. During a weekend observation in Dago, vendors helped each other move carts upon hearing patrol warnings. This solidarity was not only logistical but also emotional, providing a sense of safety and moral support under constant uncertainty. According to Hr, a vendor, such networks made him feel "not alone" in facing municipal pressures.

These strategies can be read through Yates' (2022) framework, which emphasizes that resistance to power does not always appear as open confrontation but often as small, hidden, and indirect acts aimed at defending marginalized interests. In Bandung, PKL's location mobility, product diversification, and community solidarity represent tactical negotiations, non-frontal yet effective, for sustaining access to urban spaces. Gilmore et al. (2024) and Zembylas (2021) expand this perspective with the concept of the micro-politics of survival, whereby vulnerable groups reconfigure their interactions with power structures through adaptive, often situational strategies.

Field observations illustrated these strategies in motion. On Jalan Braga, mobility was visible in the periodic relocation of stalls to match tourist flows and enforcement intensity. At the Alun-Alun, diversification manifested in combined offerings of food and souvenirs within a single stall. In Dago, solidarity emerged through real-time information sharing via text

messages or subtle signals when patrols approached. These patterns show that PKL are not passive actors awaiting policy changes but active subjects continuously reconfiguring survival strategies.

From an urban policy perspective, these adaptation strategies present a paradox. On one hand, they are seen as “violations” of spatial order aimed at creating tourist-friendly aesthetics. On the other, they represent practical rationalities that enable PKL to maintain livelihoods under increasingly restrictive policies. In this sense, the micro-politics of survival identified by Gilmore et al. (2024) reveal adaptation as not merely reactive but also an active reshaping of power relations in urban space.

The presence of location mobility, product diversification, and community solidarity among Bandung’s PKL underscores that they cannot be reduced to mere victims of gentrification. They are part of the very production of urban space, whose adaptive strategies preserve public space inclusivity amid exclusive urbanization pressures. This reality should be an important consideration for city policymakers, not to erase these practices, but to integrate them into more collaborative and socially just spatial planning models.

Tensions and Negotiations: Divergent Perceptions of the Function of Public Space

Amidst Bandung’s urban landscape, which continues to be polished to enhance its tourism image and attractiveness to investors, divergent perceptions regarding the function of public space between the municipal government and street vendors (PKL) have become a source of tension that remains difficult to reconcile. For the government, public spaces such as Jalan Braga, Alun-Alun Bandung, and Dago are positioned as the city’s showcase, sites where aesthetics, cleanliness, and order serve as indicators of governance success. In various planning documents and official statements, these spaces are defined as part of the city’s “face,” expected to project a modern and comfortable impression for tourists. Conversely, for PKL, these same spaces carry an entirely different meaning: they are arenas of everyday life, sources of livelihood, and sites of social interaction cultivated over many years.

This divergence is evident in field interviews. Several PKL expressed that government relocation offers, such as culinary centers or designated markets, cannot substitute the organic crowds they enjoy in strategic city-center locations. A beverage vendor in Dago, here referred to as Nn, explained that while the new designated space is tidy and orderly, it attracts few visitors as it lies far from tourist flows. This aligns with field observations showing that relocation sites tend to be situated on the peripheries of tourist zones and poorly integrated with pedestrian flows. As a result, vendors’ income declines drastically, forcing some to return to their old selling spots clandestinely, particularly during periods of lax enforcement.

From the city government’s perspective, however, organizing public space is framed as an effort to provide collective comfort. In their view, unregulated PKL presence obstructs pedestrian flows, conceals the façades of historic buildings, and diminishes the aesthetic value of urban areas. Yet the language of “orderliness,” as emphasized by Fieuw et al. (2022) and Ghouchani et al. (2023), often reflects a middle-class bias in which the economic needs of the urban poor are subordinated to aesthetic and commercial interests. Within this perspective, policies that neglect the aspirations of marginalized communities in fact restrict

their access to the benefits of urban space, creating what has been termed a policy–community gap.

These tensions are further sharpened by negotiation mechanisms that expose power asymmetries. In several official forums, PKL are invited to provide input regarding spatial management plans. However, as revealed by a PKL community leader in Braga, here referred to as Mr, their contributions are rarely incorporated into final decisions. This indicates that the offered participation is more symbolic than substantive. Field observations reinforce this impression: coordination meetings are often dominated by government presentations, while discussion sessions allowing PKL voices are granted minimal and limited time.

The absence of genuine participatory dialogue contradicts the principle of the Right to the City introduced by Harvey (2017) and further developed by Kato-Huerta & Geneletti (2023) through the concept of inclusive urban governance. This principle emphasizes that residents, especially marginalized groups such as PKL, possess equal rights to shape the trajectory of urban development, including the functions and management of public spaces. Within this framework, relocation or restrictions should not be seen merely as technical matters of spatial management, but also as political decisions concerning the just distribution of urban space.

Field conditions reveal that without meaningful involvement, public space management policies tend to generate subtle yet tangible forms of exclusion. In Alun-Alun Bandung, for instance, pedestrian zones restricted for PKL force them to operate only at the peripheries, far from the crowds. Observations during the afternoon show vendors competing for narrow strips of land outside the designated boundaries, while tourist flows remain concentrated inside areas sterilized from informal activities. This results in spatial segregation between zones deemed “suitable” for tourism and zones relegated for the street economy.

In informal negotiations, some PKL have sought middle ground. They have proposed rotating operating hours or smaller stall designs that do not block pedestrian paths. Yet such proposals are rarely met with positive responses from the government. A souvenir vendor in Braga, here referred to as Sn, recounted that they once submitted a proposal for foldable stalls that could be easily assembled and disassembled, but it received no official reply. This has added to vendors’ frustration, as they perceive spatial policies as privileging aesthetics over compromise with residents’ economic needs.

From the perspective of inclusive urban governance, the failure to establish egalitarian dialogue reinforces structural tensions between policy and community. The government interprets public space functions through the lens of formal economy and city image, whereas PKL imbue them with meanings of informal economic survival and social connectivity. This mismatch of frameworks fuels conflicts that impact not only livelihoods but also residents’ sense of ownership and attachment to urban space.

The issue is thus not merely about who may occupy public space, but also about who holds the authority to define its form and meaning. In line with the spirit of the Right to the City, urban spaces should be shared resources managed for the benefit of all residents, not just select segments deemed more “appropriate” or “representative” of the city’s image. Yet,

as evident in Bandung, the dominance of aesthetic and tourism narratives tends to displace the dimension of social justice in urban planning (Ng, 2022).

If this pattern persists, public spaces will increasingly become exclusive arenas accessible primarily to groups aligned with the government's vision, while residents such as PKL will be pushed into marginal corners of the city. Over the long term, this not only erodes the diversity of economic activities in public spaces but also diminishes the social dynamism that has long been a hallmark of Bandung as a vibrant and inclusive urban space.

Prospects for the Sustainability of Street Economies Amid Urban Modernization

Amidst the tides of urban modernization, the sustainability of street economies stands at a crossroads between opportunity and threat. On the one hand, modernization promises improved infrastructure, growing tourist flows, and wider market potential. On the other hand, it also imposes spatial management logics that frequently marginalize informal actors such as PKL. The potential for collaborative spaces between the government and PKL communities is therefore key to ensuring that urban transformation does not sacrifice the resilience of street economies. Such collaborations may include creating temporary trade zones at strategic points activated during certain hours, flexible time-based regulations, or integrating PKL into the design of urban tourism.

A veteran vendor in the Dago area, active since the late 1990s, recalled having proposed to officials that PKL be permitted to operate only from late afternoon to evening, when pedestrian traffic is high and office activities taper off. Although this proposal was economically and socially reasonable, it has yet to be formally accommodated, reflecting the continued scarcity of genuine dialogue spaces.

Experiences from other cities in the Global South illustrate that integrating PKL within modern urban planning is not impossible. In Bangkok, for instance, city authorities collaborated with vendor associations to designate "hawker zones" equipped with sanitation facilities, waste bins, and standardized stalls to prevent pedestrian obstruction. In Bogotá, Colombia, a program integrated PKL into tourism corridors through customer-service training and stall designs aligned with the city's visual identity. Such practices demonstrate that PKL need not always be seen as obstacles to order but can instead contribute to a more inclusive tourism narrative. Adapting these models to Bandung would require recognizing the informal economy as a vital component of the urban ecosystem, particularly in providing economic access to low-income groups.

Field observations at Alun-Alun Bandung during weekends show how PKL, despite being tightly regulated, remain a major draw for domestic tourists. Along the eastern side of the square, clusters of vendors selling drinks, traditional snacks, and children's toys attract families exiting the mosque area. These stalls, though modest, hold a distinctive appeal: the sweet aroma of kue cubit mingling with the savory scent of fried meatballs, the lively calls of vendors offering promotional prices, and the vibrant colors of snacks captivating children. Such observations highlight that PKL serve not only as providers of goods and services but also as creators of the social and cultural atmosphere that shapes visitors' experiences of the city. To remove or relocate them away from central crowds would strip public spaces of one

of the elements that make them lively.

From the perspective of just sustainability theory (Nederhand et al., 2023), urban sustainability cannot be measured solely through environmental indicators and infrastructure efficiency but also through the extent to which cities ensure socio-economic justice for all residents. PKL, as part of the informal sector, provide livelihoods for thousands of families while offering affordable goods to consumers. In other words, they fill gaps often left unaddressed by the formal sector. When modernization policies neglect PKL, what disappears is not merely small stalls on sidewalks but also microeconomic networks that support lower-class urban life. This resonates with Agyeman's argument that a sustainable city is one that balances development needs with the economic rights of marginalized groups.

Some PKL expressed their willingness to comply with regulations if the government offered viable alternatives. A snack vendor on Jalan Braga, active for over 15 years, stated that they did not reject the idea of spatial management as long as replacement locations remained within pedestrian flows. Yet in practice, relocations are often directed to areas with little foot traffic, leading to sharp income declines. This reinforces findings that the main issue is not the concept of management itself but the mismatch between the economic logic of PKL and the aesthetic logic of city authorities (Tuanaya, 2024). In many cases, governments prioritize clean, orderly, and "Instagrammable" public spaces to attract tourists, whereas PKL require bustling and accessible locations for their survival.

The potential for integrating PKL into the design of urban tourism is considerable. The government, for example, could curate certain areas as "street food heritage zones" that combine local culinary traditions with the historical narratives of urban districts. This approach would not only preserve PKL's presence but also enhance the city's tourism value. Bandung, with its reputation as a creative city, has the opportunity to leverage its street-food richness as part of its urban identity. Such efforts call for cross-sectoral collaboration: city officials, PKL communities, public-space designers, and tourism stakeholders must work together to devise spatial models accommodating all interests. This approach would also reduce policy resistance, as PKL would feel genuinely included in decision-making (Sulaiman et al., 2024).

Recognizing the informal economy as an integral part of the urban ecosystem is therefore a fundamental step. Until now, regulatory frameworks have tended to position the informal sector as a problem to be controlled, rather than a potential to be optimized. Yet, according to Chen (2023) and Sultana et al. (2022a), the informal sector absorbs up to 61% of the workforce in developing countries, making it one of the key pillars of urban economies. Thus, sustaining street economies should not be seen as preserving "disorder," but rather as an inclusive development strategy. Modernization that excludes PKL produces a city exclusive not only spatially but also economically.

Analytically, the prospects for sustaining street economies will depend on how far urban modernization can adopt principles of just sustainability in every spatial policy. If modernization is understood merely as a visual and physical transformation, PKL will remain vulnerable. However, if modernization is conceived as an opportunity to broaden access and

benefits for all layers of society, including those in the informal sector, then cities can evolve without sacrificing the diversity of public-space functions. Within this framework, collaboration, recognition, and integration stand as the three pillars ensuring that street economies not only survive but also contribute to a sustainable, inclusive, and socially just urban vision.

CONCLUSION

This study underscores that gentrification in Bandung is not merely a neutral process of urban renewal but actively reshapes access to and rights over public space in exclusive ways, marginalizing street economies that have long been integral to the urban ecosystem. Field findings reveal that under strict spatial-management pressures, PKL are not passive actors but demonstrate adaptive capacities through location mobility, product diversification, and strengthened solidarity networks as subtle yet effective negotiation strategies. The tensions arising from divergent perceptions of public space, between the government's aesthetic-commercial logic and PKL's socio-economic meanings, point to structural gaps in inclusive urban governance. By integrating perspectives from Urban Political Economy, Informal Economy, and the Right to the City, this study broadens gentrification scholarship to the context of non-residential public spaces in the Global South, offering an analytical framework applicable to other developing cities while emphasizing the urgency of collaborative policies that not only acknowledge the informal economy but also integrate it equitably within urban modernization visions.

ETHICAL STATEMENT AND DISCLOSURE

This study was conducted in accordance with established ethical principles, including informed consent, protection of informants' confidentiality, and respect for local cultural values. Special consideration was given to participants from vulnerable groups to ensure their safety, comfort, and equal rights to participate. No external funding was received, and the authors declare no conflict of interest. All data and information presented were collected through valid research methods and have been verified to ensure their accuracy and reliability. The use of artificial intelligence (AI) was limited to technical assistance for writing and language editing, without influencing the scientific substance of the work. The authors express their gratitude to the informants for their valuable insights, and to the anonymous reviewers for their constructive feedback on an earlier version of this manuscript. The authors take full responsibility for the content and conclusions of this article.

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